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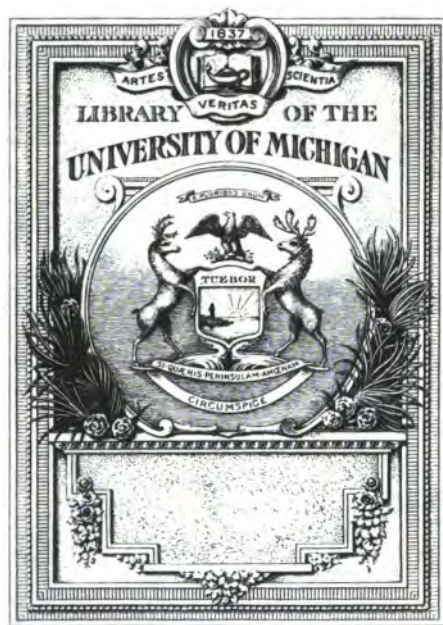
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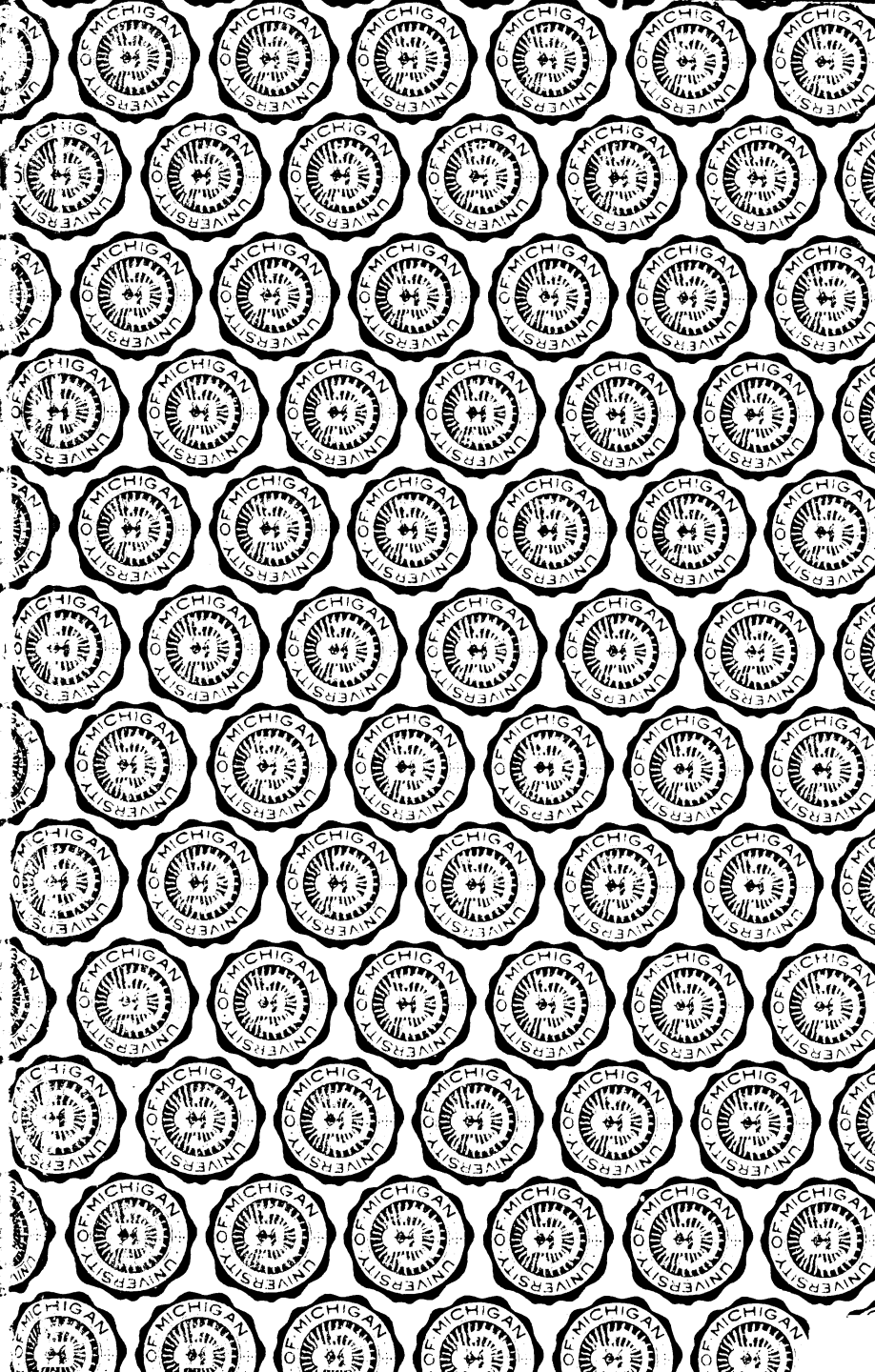
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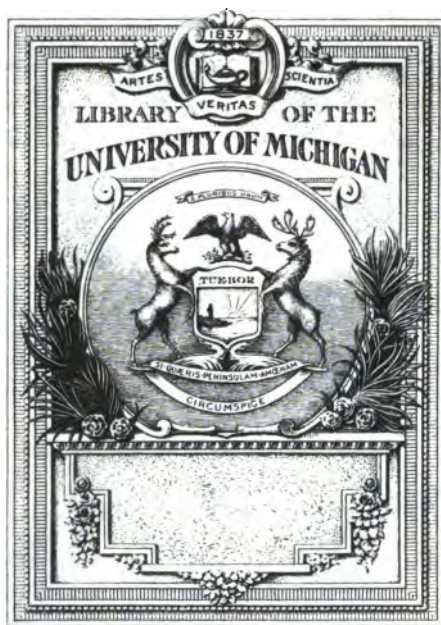
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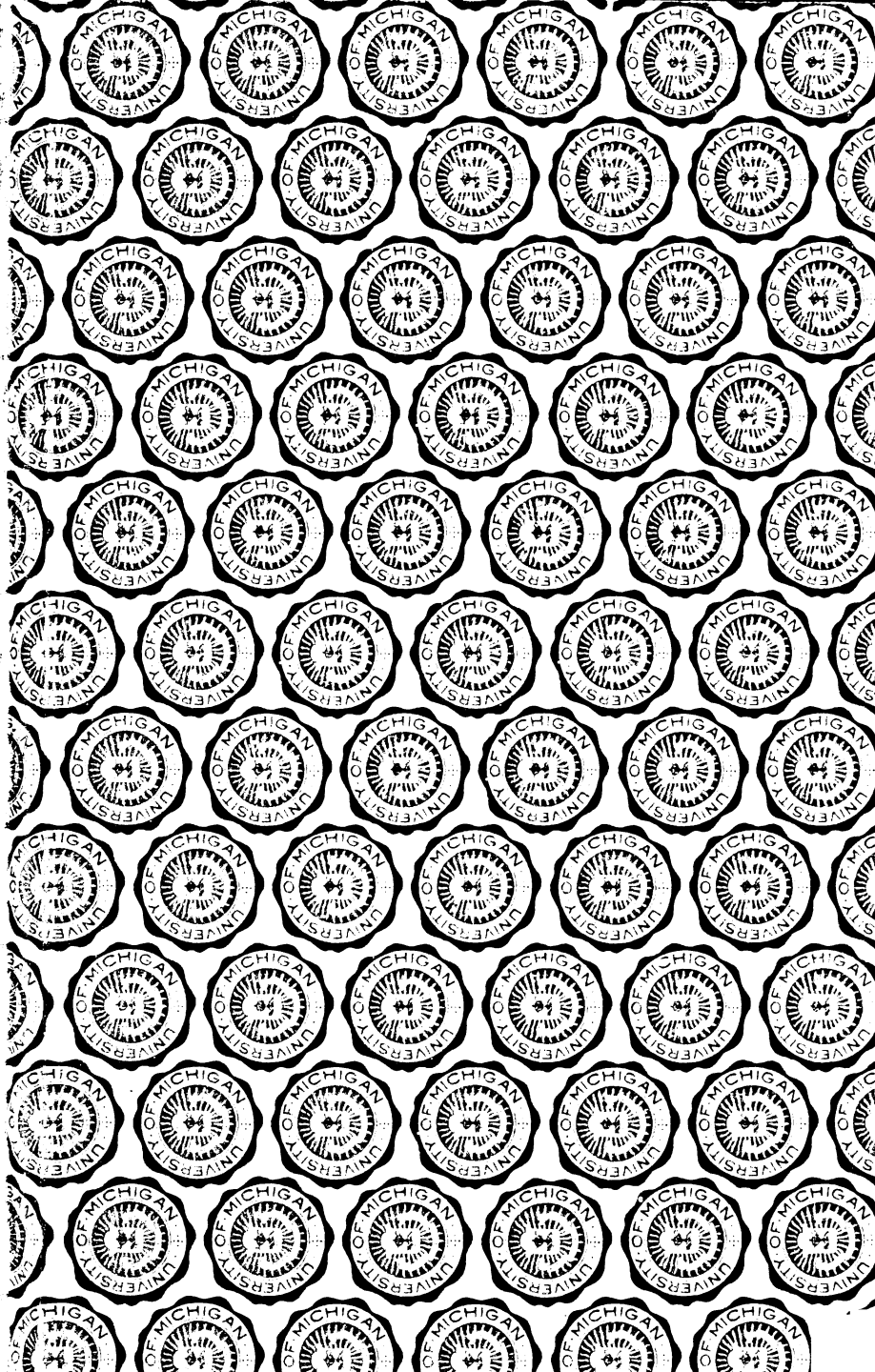
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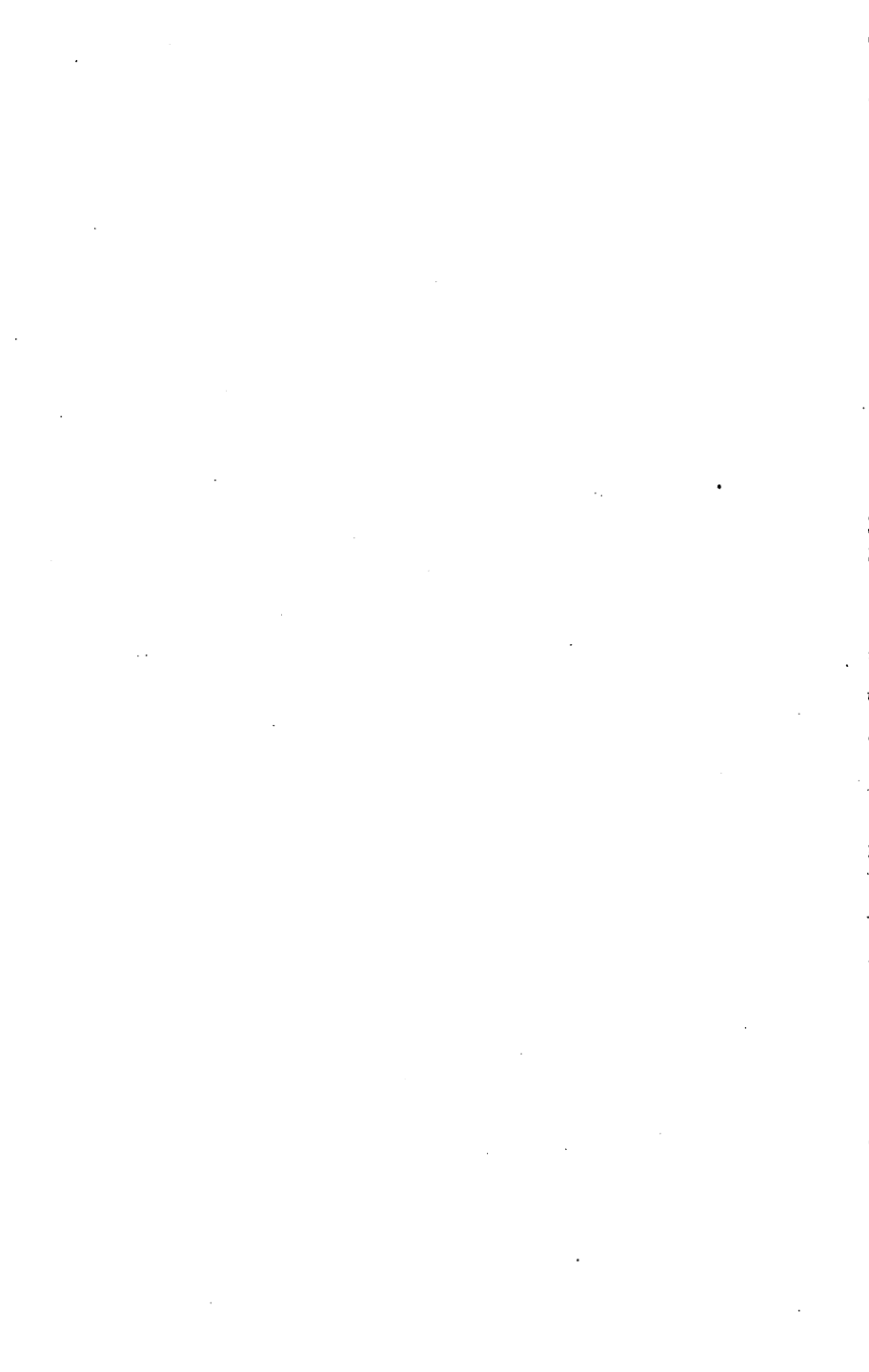


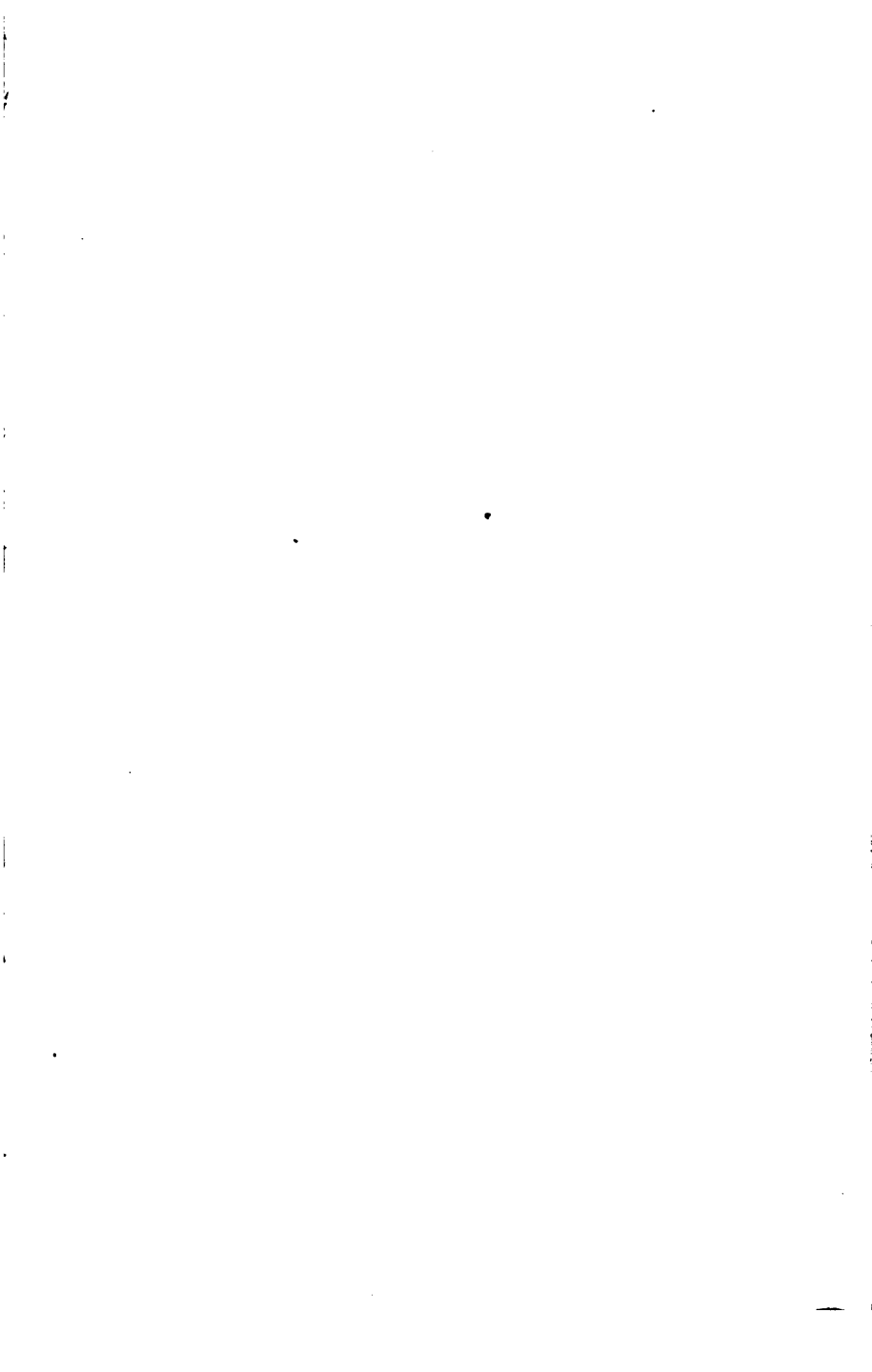


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A FLORIDA FARM

By

FREDERIC WHITMORE

—
With Drawings by
William R. Whitmore

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Reprinted from
THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY
with Additions
—

The Ridgewood Press
Springfield Mass.

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Hist. South.
Smith Bk Co.
10-19-28
18129

Preface

PIONEERS go out to win fortunes upon the ever broadening fringes of civilization. A few succeed, and tell of their success; many fail and are silent. Perhaps it would be well if the commoner tale were sometimes told. It is not necessarily a dreary tale. It wants, indeed, the charm of a happy finis—but it has incidents by the way, and it is touched with the humors of reality. Something is won, if not fortune, in these unrecorded adventures of average men: some experience of life, a widened knowledge of its difficulties, a fellow feeling for those who fail, now and then a little tardy wisdom.

The writer is conscious that the following

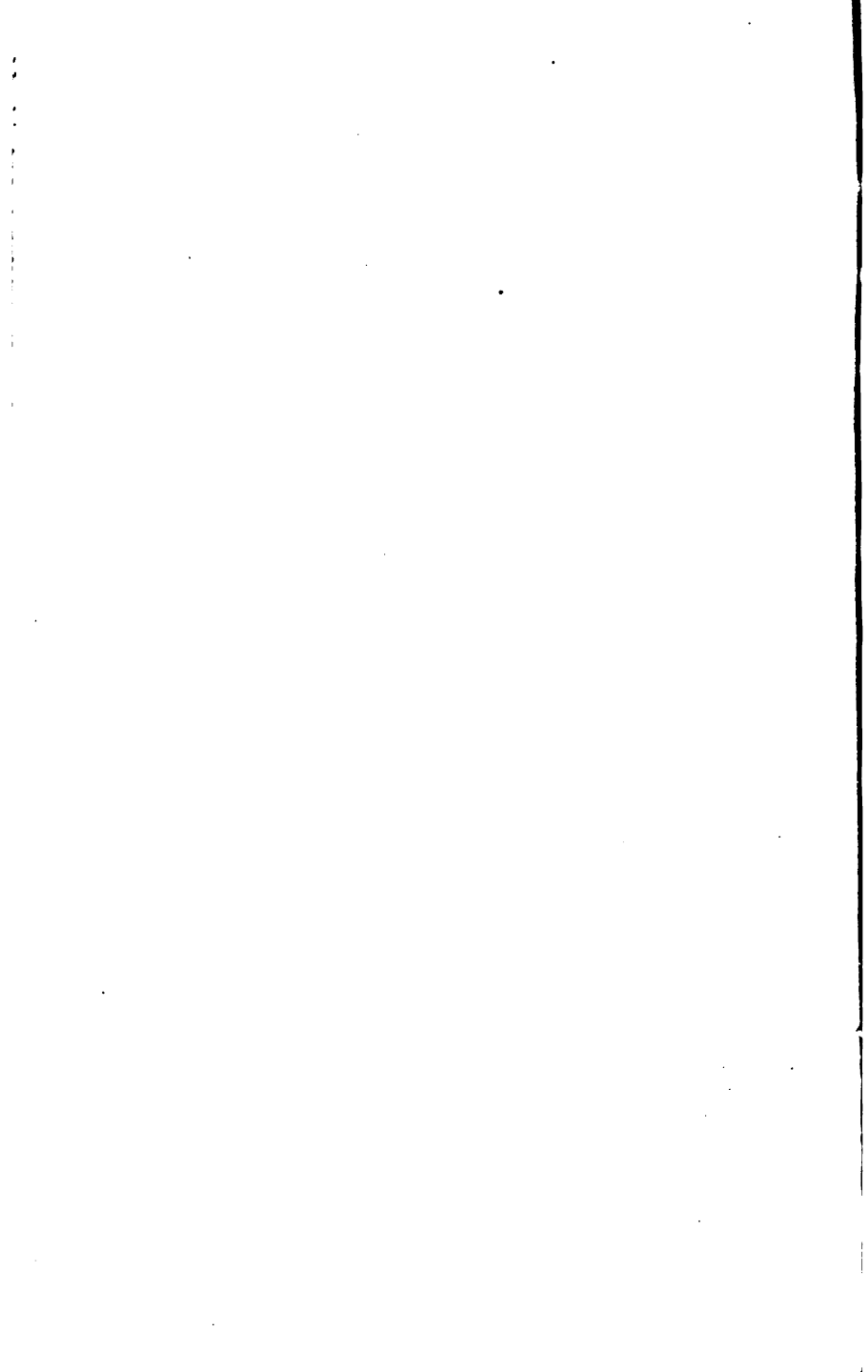
Preface

pages lack philosophy; he thinks that they might be accentuated by a more tragic method at the end. But he is himself no philosopher. The story he tells is his own, and it takes a quality of comedy inseparable from a too familiar protagonist. If he fails of sympathy for himself, he is prepared to accept that of the reader, and to count it among his winnings.

A FLORIDA FARM

To FARLEY and RUFUS

EG.



A Florida Farm

The Land Agent Appears



OUR purpose in going thither was primarily to make money. Incidentally, we hoped to find vigor in an out-door life, and other pleasant possibilities allured us and led us to embark in the venture.

The venture seemed promising. Immigrants were pouring into the state and land prices were rising. Lake Osseyo was linked by its drainage canal with navigable waters which flowed at last into the sea. A vast tract of rich soil was dried by the lowering of its level.

A Florida Farm

The shores, upon a circuit of fifty miles, were changing hands, and men were building homes and ploughing fields where, but two years before, fishes had swum and alligators basked in the saw-grass. The chief settlement of the region was already a city and the capital of a county; not a paper city of the land-speculators, but a municipality presided over by a mayor, misruled by a board of councilmen, and provided with schools, churches, and drinking-saloons. A newspaper devoted itself to its praises; rail and water carriage met on its long pier, and through trains from the far north drew up to discharge a daily file of tourists and prospectors. A Mississippi steamer, with towering funnels, swung at anchor in the offing. Another, belonging to the drainage company, lay belching black smoke, or swept away

The Land Agent Appears

toward the horizon, with a ribbon of foam unwinding from its broad stern-wheel. The tattoo of the builder's hammer sounded all day in the woods and by the water.

We had seen many towns and villages in a leisurely prospecting tour ; we had an extensive acquaintance with land-agents, and we were disheartened by the memory of many ineligible offers of property. We liked little that was characteristically Floridian, except certain agricultural possibilities of the winter. In this mood we had waked, one morning, at Osseyo City, and looked out to see what it was like. For the first time in many days we had slept refreshingly; no mosquitoes, no sultry heats, had jaded us. A steady wind, laden with forest odors, was drawing through the open windows. The globe of the sun lay on the verge of a

A Florida Farm

wide rippled water, crimsoning fresh meadows and the trunks of innumerable pines. An intermittent tinkling of bells, a smell of sawn cypress wood, a delicious chill of the morning wind, stirred certain fibers of happy memory. We seemed suddenly to be listening to the clank of Swiss cow-bells and inhaling the fragrance of dew and unpainted pine, in some inn of the Oberland. It was a far reminiscence, for the meadows and forest glades were level as the lake. But it pleased and curiously pre-disposed us. Here at last was coolness; here was green grass, and a pleasant un-Floridian impression of Florida. We looked sanguinely out into the blue morning.

After breakfast we lighted cigarettes, and glanced around indulgently for the city. At first we saw nothing more urban than sparse pines

The Land Agent Appears

and their steady shade, cropping cattle and their moving shadows. But the city disclosed itself as we wandered about, sceptically credulous, subtly prepossessed by the absence of mosquitoes and land-agents, ready to have faith in a sub-tropical region where the May breeze was vivifying and the turf firm underfoot. The clusters of dwellings proved to be more numerous than we had thought, for the city was laid out on a generous plan, with an eye to the future. Embowered in glistening banana leaves or smoky willow-oaks, with "sayling pines" overhead, and the level forest lawn all about — pioneer flotillas adventuring in the green sea of the wilderness — they seemed pleasant enough, after the Sahara of the Sand Hills, and the stagnant hotness of the orange plantations. It was true that the houses were

A Florida Farm

mostly white-washed shanties, giving themselves residential airs by means of a veranda and a stovepipe in the roof. But to the cultivated eye the texture of whitewash is agreeable, and an excellent background for banana plumes. It takes the meridional sunrise richly, and gleams snow-like in the still southern noons. To the eye of the prospector, moreover, all things relate to the circumjacent wildness. A log hut is respectable and a frame shanty savors of gentility ; a bow-window is a burgeon of taste and enterprise.

When we had visited the residence-quarters, we strolled upon the hard sands of the lake shore, and admired the vast bowl of blue ripples. As we looked, the wind freshened, dark flurries scudded over the shining level, a little sailing-boat bent to the gusts, threw up a

The Land Agent Appears

white furrow, and shot into the sun-path. We loved wind and bright water; we felt a joy in sails as of a sea-bird in its wings. We did not say so — but our dream of farming in Florida was blent with a vision of water, and the ploughing of waves in this manner seemed germane to the purpose.

So when we reached the blue frame “blocks” at the pier, the basking steamer, the hardware store, the two grocery stores, the dry-goods store, the druggist’s, and the saloons — fronting the morning sun with blistered paint and foggy glass — we were already won over in some measure. Our hearts did not sink at the pyramids of scarlet canned goods beneath a festoon of calf boots and calicoes, at the loungers on the unswept doorsills, at the whiff of spilled liquors from the saloons. Rather, we smiled at

The Land Agent Appears

these things, and found them more urban than we had expected. A cowboy, with a broad hat and jingling spurs, gave them a fine frontier flavor, as he issued from a saloon and rode jauntily off, his whip-lash whirling and pistol-ing about his head.

In due season the land-agent appeared, and we fell into his lap like ripened fruit. It was of quite a little principality that he disburdened himself in our favor—a great lake-fronting meadow, fringed about with virgin pine-lands. The woods came to the water's brink at one corner, with a house-site, as if we had so willed it. A strip of silver sand, firm and broad as a highway, coasted the meadow and shelved beneath the clear lip of the lake. We departed, with lightened purses, to return in the autumn.

Settling

IN September I engaged the services of a young New Englander, named Rufus, and put up with him at the Osseyo City Hotel. A camp-kit followed us from the North, and a serviceable cedar boat, with sculls and a jointed mast, which we christened the Egret. We bought a brisk-gaited gray gelding and a green wagon, and drove daily to the principality, the sawmill, and other points, upon our business of settling. Rufus looked keenly about him, but said little. His notion of farming was practical, with a rude and sceptical sense of obstacles ; mine was theoretical and optimistic. Now and then he dropped a piece of Yankee

A Florida Farm

caustic on my illusions. He looked glum over the remoteness of the principality from points of supply and shipment, and smiled grimly when I spoke of it as "only six miles out."

At last all was made ready, and the trunks, camp-kit, and provisions were loaded on the green wagon. They had seemed but a few trifles, of themselves—yet they made a great heap, together, and gave a formidable notion of housekeeping. My heart sank a little, now that the time was come. Osseyo City assumed an unwonted pleasantness; its white shanties clustered neighborly; the hotel was beginning to exhale a faint prophecy of dinner. But I was outward bound, in the part of a sturdy pioneer, and I must cover my qualms with a smiling face—like a sea-traveller. I unmoored the Egret with an

Settling

appearance of unconcern, and ran out the oars, while Rufus drove off with the load.

An alligator on the beach appeared to be the only tenant of my demesne, when I grounded the Egret; but as I entered the wood-edge I perceived oxen yoked to a load of yellow lumber, and the driver reclining on the grass. He came toward me with a question in his face, which presently took shape on his lips: "Whar'bouts do you want the lumber at?" Where, indeed? It was a matter to have considered more nicely, for Southern pine is heavy to move, and this was the planting of house. I lit my pipe and brooded in perplexity. There was a glade among the pines, a little lake of clear sward, a hundred yards inland from the larger lake. This, I thought, was the spot. The driver had his views: he

A Florida Farm

would drop the lumber where I directed, but if it was his'n, he'd put it yonder on the rising ground; it was pretty tol'ble dry there. I looked about once more. It was dry everywhere, for the moment, and my eye was not refined to the distinctions of flatwoods topography: the glade seemed of a level with the "rising ground." I understood his advice afterward, when the pools gathered in the wet season, and the little grass mere was sheeted with water. He knew what kept the pines from growing there, but he said no more. A building site was chosen, and the fresh planks fell with a hollow clatter on the grass. When the driver was gone, I strolled off and reassured myself about the spot. A small oak grove was on the lakeside to the left, another to the right. Two lanceolate tufts of saw-palmetto

Settling

flanked an open way between, and the blue water showed all along. The land broke from a low terrace to the beach. It was a site made to hand.

Rufus admitted it, when he drove up with the creaking load. We accordingly fell to with hammer and saw; and when the dusk began to thicken, the timber anatomy of a small cottage glimmered already among the pines. We hastened to lay planks on the joists of the upper floor, and had a tent stretched on these, and the gray tethered beneath, when the night closed in. Rufus made coffee upon an oil stove and opened a tin of meat; and the tent, with cots neatly spread and a swinging lantern above, took a homelike air, as we supped from a pine box. So I tried to think, at all events, and I remarked upon it to Rufus, who assented.

A Florida Farm

But this was the official view. The forest lay all about, shuddering with breezes and vocal with crickets and strange movings in the palmettos, and the solitude seemed to creep into the tent when the ladder was drawn up and the light put out.

There is always a novelty about a morning if one is disposed to enjoy it. The observer perceives it to be different from the day before and not quite like any other that he has seen. It may be spectacular, with a sudden kindling of the east, and a burst of scarlet across the sky, like a military music; it may come in calmly, all golden and gleaming, and take the fancy unaware. It may blur the world with a mystical foggy impressionism; or make an etching of it, with a grizzle of rime and sharp graver-work against the sky. It is a charm of

Settling

fresh experience that it vivifies aspects, and puts one in the mood to see. The sky was exquisitely mottled, as we went down to the lake, after several hours of uneasy tossing, followed by a sleep. The clouds stretched high and far, like a vast frost-work, over the dawn, and I thought I had never seen anything so vivid and so delicately flushed. The still lake glassed it to the horizon, and the mirrored sky rose like a lifted banner in the ripple from our feet. The splash of the water-buckets startled some long-billed birds that were spearing for fish in the margin, and we made our toilets in a whirr of withdrawing wings. We kindled a fire, ate and drank, and the day's work began.

The woods rang with our hammers, day by day; but the little house grew slowly. The

A Florida Farm

grass went wintry with sawdust and shavings ; billets and plank ends lay thick about our feet, and the details of construction seemed similarly to accumulate, and press like a fever on the brain. Amateur house-building was an economy of dollars, perhaps, but it proved to be costly in time and strength. Finally, it seemed best to call in a man of the craft. Rufus' face grew visibly younger when this decision was announced, and the gray showed brisk heels as he galloped off for a carpenter.

The carpenter came presently—a trim figure of a fellow, with a shotgun over his shoulder and a half-filled game-pouch beside his tool-bag. He saw the situation at a glance, and met it like the quiet woods gentleman that he was. I wasn't a carpenter, was I? he tactfully inquired. Well, he 'lowed perhaps I

The First Crop

wasn't — and carpentering was a trade, sure enough. He had worked at it, a right smart while, but it was puzzling, even to him, sometimes.

I was now a conoscente in joinery, and took pleasure in his work. His manner of thumbing an edge-tool breathed craftsmanship; he would sit on a heady scaffold, his long legs dangling, plant a nail in the ceiling, and bring his hammer nonchalantly true upon it, where I must have lain on my back and bruised the planks with wild target-practice. Cupboards, verandas, railings, and lattices grew like exhalations. A tiny stable was set up, as one builds a house of cards — and at length the Gray ceased to look over his manger at our dinners, and the tent was furled.

The First Crop

MY partner, Farley, had now joined us with a reinforcement of energy, and the time was come to settle seriously down to the business of husbandry. Practically, Farley and I knew little of this business, but we had an acquaintance with the theory, like young physicians ready for practice. We ploughed several acres of grass-land by the lake, and left the turf to decay for the spring garden. We also began to clear a tract of woods on the higher ground, for an experiment with orange and lemon trees.

The clearing made a stirring interlude between the carpentering and the spring farming.

The First Crop

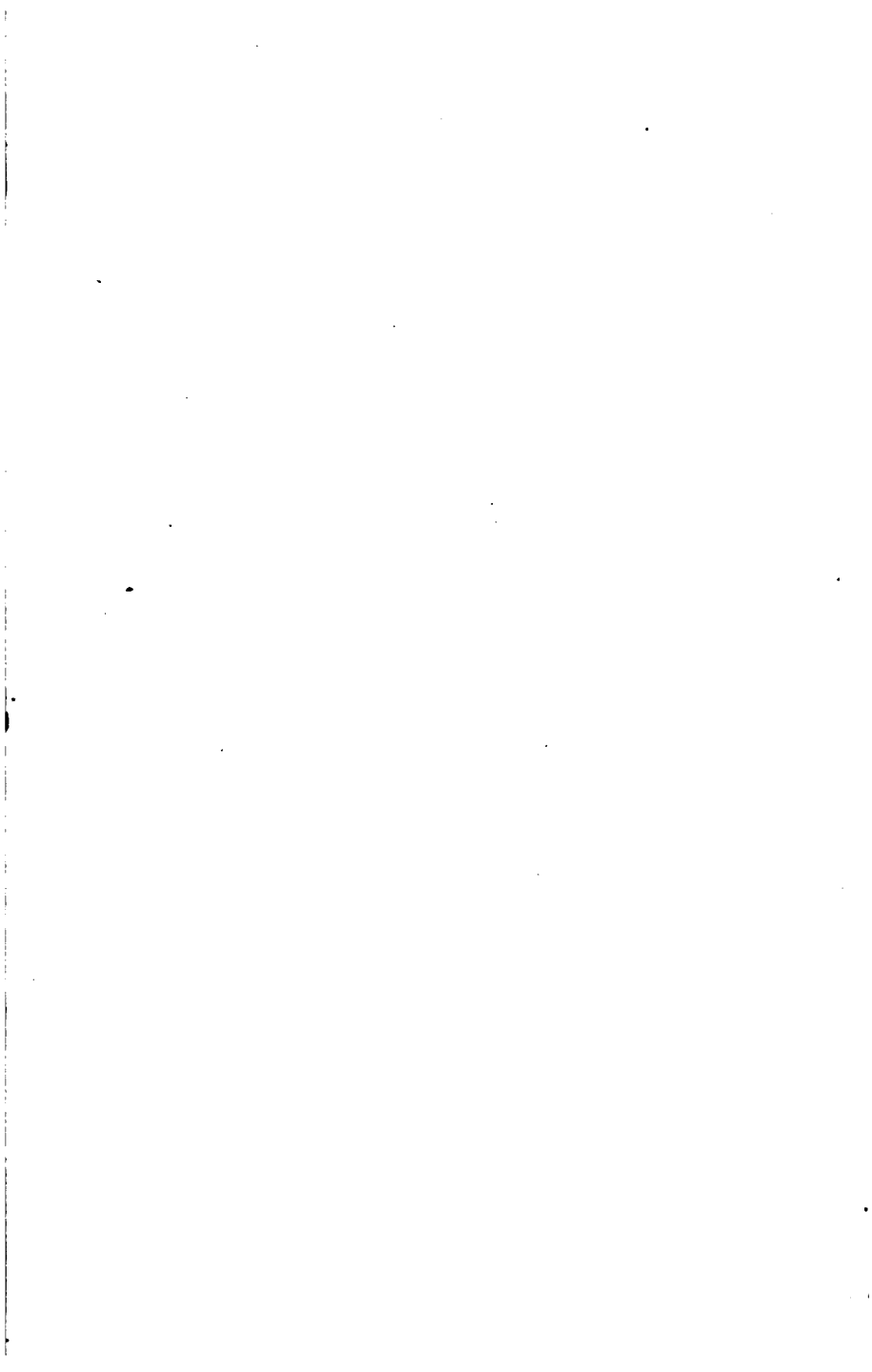
A little gang of woodsmen felled the pines and hauled their trunks to the beach, whence they were floated to a sawmill. There was a hollow hurly-burly of axes and halloos, ringing all day in the woods; and ever and anon a shriek of rending wood, a crash of limbs, and the thud of a ponderous trunk in the palmettos. Piles of roots and boughs flamed here and there. A blue mist of smoke hung over the scene, and gave a weirdness to the slow file of mules and the log-cart, creeping with a huge pine-shaft between its towering wheels.

In a pictorial view, the little lopped trees from the nursery made a sorry exchange for the butchered pines. But we set them hopefully out, tamped the woods-mould about their yellow rootlets, and drenched them with water from the lake. We began to speak imagina-

A Florida Farm

tively of the bared sand and lopped stakes, as "the grove;" and bye-and-bye the stakes responded to the fiction so far as to put forth a visible greenery. But the soil was sour with old roots; the trees grew slowly and stuntedly. Some of them took a wizened, dwarfish maturity, and all but stood still; others branched lustily, and then died back at the tips. A few mysteriously waxed sturdy in stem and limb and threw out a cloud of dark umbrage, as if to show what the rest might have done. Seeing the greater part so unrewarding, we grew indifferent, in turn, and the value of oranges falling, with a great increase of the crop, we let them sulk in the sand, and set our thoughts chiefly on tillage.

The ploughed land "turned up well," Rufus said; and in the late winter, as the sun began





The First Crop

to rise from the solstice, we sowed cucumber seeds in the warming soil. This was a pleasant light labor for breezy mornings, and we permitted it to be irradiated with a hope of profit. Winter cucumbers in New York, we knew, were sold like choice roses. We could not hope for the top of the market in late March or April, it was true, but we were not avaricious; a few hundred dollars per acre, we observed, would do for a beginning.

The field lay along a low dune of beach sand that gleamed against the lake. Tall woods hedged the inland boundary, and a great water-side prairie broadened from one end. We made mounds with a hoe, worked a handful of phosphate into each, and leveled the top. In these we traced trenches with the fingers, sprinkled a line of seeds, and covered and "firmed"

A Florida Farm

them in. A week later, we sowed a second line, and in another week a third, to make triply sure against mishaps of cold. It was the third sowing that found favoring heats, and far on in March the vines were beginning to creep outward from the hills. It was late — late even for a return of a few modest hundreds of dollars per acre — but we blithely hoed and hoped, and the mocking-birds sang, with mellow throats, above the speckling blossoms.

The mocking-birds, much at ease, fluted in the balmy noons; and the cucumber vines, likewise much at ease, lengthened and branched, till the field was a tangle of over-lapping leaves. Market quotations for cucumbers went slowly down, and the vines manifested no concern. We made ready for the crop, with crates and shipping plans — and the vines nonchalantly

The First Crop

sunned their rank leaves, and bedecked them with yellow bloom. "Consider the" cucumbers "of the field: they toil not, neither do they spin." It was a beautiful sight, and we tried to look upon it as Solomon might have done. It occurred to us that we might gather wisdom, even if we could not gather cucumbers.

The blossoms began to fall, and we moused sharply among the vines. And lo, on a sudden, a cucumber! Farley discovered it, and we gathered about it with becoming emotions. There it was at last, a cucumber, an indubitable cucumber, of the size of a mixed pickle—lilliputian, indeed, but complete in all its parts, green and spiny, with a festive blossom at the end. Farley and I knelt and adored it, as it were. It was like the joys of paternity.

Rufus looked on with a sardonic humor which

A Florida Farm

he kept for rare occasions. "Git out your crates, git out your crates," he said grimly: "time to ship the crop. Crop's small, but so are the prices." I turned to him, unaffected by the innuendo, the flush of fruition in my face. "I say, Rufus, how long does it take a cucumber to grow up?" Rufus' face grew red, his spare frame underwent a contortion, he slapped his knee and burst into a fit of laughter. "Don't you know?" he cried, choking: "Oh, fifteen to twenty years, without the weather's warm. If it is, four or five days."

In four or five days, the weather being warm, the cucumber had grown up, and the vines were teeming with pickles. We began to ship the crop toward the end of April, and we ceased to ship it when the first returns came in. We kept the wisdom for our own consumption.

The Grubbers

WE had not given ourselves wholly to the cucumbers. The woods about were irregularly belittered with shrubs of the saw-palmetto, a dwarf palm with a single black root, creeping on the surface like a huge caterpillar, and bearing a bunch of fan-like leaves at the end. The leaves were of a lustrous green that caught the sun-gleams among the pines, and their bristling clusters made a curious and tropical scenery. But the roots were cumbering, and the leaf-stems had rows of spinelets that scratched like saw-teeth. They were also a harborage for snakes, and in a region where these were dangerous it was well to have open footing about the cottage.

A Florida Farm

We accordingly contracted with certain of our neighbors — locally called Crackers — to grub away the adjacent palmettos. This was a taxing work for the back and the patience, and the Crackers were of a convivial turn and averse monotonous exertion. The contracts being ratified, therefore, they encamped at hand in a picturesque and roystering style, played cards, discharged revolvers, came and went, and tipped about a flaring night-fire. Sometimes they disappeared for days, and we heard of them vaguely, as recuperating from their labors. Now and then they did a little grubbing.

When this occurred, I made a point of going out to encourage them — whiling the laborious hours with fables of the mythical North: tales of snow and frozen streams, of towns larger even than Osseyo City, of buildings taller than

The Grubbers

the tallest yellow pines, of forests of shipping, and bar-rooms with floors of marble — inter-fusing these delectable fancies with ingenious reflections on Northern persistence with the matter in hand. I cannot say that these apologues forwarded the grubbing, but they seemed to give the Crackers a great conceit of my inventive powers. There sprang up between us, indeed, a very genial relation. The Crackers called me by my first name, not in forwardness, but with a pleasant scriptural simplicity; they leaned on their grubbing-hoes and gathered matter for camp-fables; and when they had listened for a time they perceived themselves to be exhausted with toil, and retired to mend the fire for dinner. After several weeks of campaigning in this manner they confessed themselves worsted, and the encampment broke up.

A Florida Farm

A piece of palmetto on the glade-edge remained, and for this I betook myself to one Mr. Daly, a vagrant Irishman temporarily at hand. I call him Mr. Daly because there was much mutual dignity in our relation, and it never occurred to either of us to drop the mister, or to decline to the fellowship of the mere Cracker. For the Cracker Mr. Daly professed a fine Hibernian "contimpt," assuming himself and me to be apart in a common superiority, and respecting me next to himself, as a person of like traditions. "So you're from New York. Why, I'm from New York meself!" he said, as he surveyed me at our first meeting—and we treated thenceforth as from power to power. It appeared that we had likewise sojourned at Saratoga together, without knowing it—Mr. Daly having passed his nights

The Grubbers

there, at a time, in the caboose of a gravel-train. Mr. Daly had a thick, hairy forearm and a muscular back. He spat upon his palms and plied the grub-hoe manfully and steadily till the ground was cleared.

Summer and the Rains

AFTER the cucumbers were gathered the weather grew summer-like. We had taken the precaution to acquaint ourselves in advance with the seasons by means of sundry pamphlets issued to induce immigration. We were aware that the Florida summer was more genial than the torrid summers of the North. Fanning winds spiced with the resin of the woods, a shining equableness, showers with a glint of lightning to manufacture ozone, brief aspersions withdrawn at the sojourner's convenience, a general blueness and balminess—such we understood to be the Florida summer.

We were a little surprised, therefore, to find

Summer and the Rains

it hot, blazingly and blisteringly hot. The May sun rose, every morning, like a huge ruddy coal. Despite the resinous breezes, possibly fanned by them, it burned swiftly to an intolerable incandescence, and smote us with languor as we toiled forth to our tasks. It flagellated our backs; our knees weakened beneath it in the field; our lips parched with thirst; we seemed about to ignite, but when we had drunk rivers of water a merciful perspiration burst forth and prevented the conflagration. Yet we rather liked it—it was so absurdly superlative, and such a satire on the veracity of land agents. Gradually, too, we underwent a partial acclimating, and learned to suffer with equanimity.

But it was otherwise with Rufus. We prudently perspired; Rufus insisted on sweating.

A Florida Farm

In vain I pointed out to him the greater comfortableness of perspiring, not in a euphemistic, but a practical view. "It depends partly on how you take it," I said, as we planted fence-posts together, in a flaming sun: "the man who sweats is of course hot; the man who only perspires is cooled by the process."

Rufus listened with swelling cheeks; he embraced a huge cypress post and flung it indignantly into the hole I had dug. "You can do 's you like," he said shortly: "I mean to sweat! For land's sake," he added, as the post rebounded and knocked off his hat: "for land's sake — do let a fellow sweat, if he wants to!"

I said no more: it was the irritable half hour before dinner, and I perceived the jest to be mis-timed. I picked up his hat and put it pro-

Summer and the Rains

pitiatigly on his head, and we labored in silence till the dinner-horn sounded.

But Rufus played on the theme thereafter. Whenever the heat was uncommonly fierce he would offer the backs of his hands for inspection, and ask severely what I called that! If it was early in the day, I would venture to say "perspiration," and Rufus would say "shucks!" If it was the hour of faintness and exasperation, I would prudently say "sweat"—and Rufus would snort, and defer the assault he had seemed to meditate.

Notwithstanding the heat, we accomplished much. I do not know how we did it, for it seemed a feat merely to exist. Perhaps the heroism of this performance nerved us for further effort. We not only existed, we cooked meals and ate them; we cleared them away;

A Florida Farm

we went out to delve and plough, and to rout pillaging cattle and swine; we added a great stretch of tillage-land to the cucumber field, and fenced it against the pigs.

These last, ranging the woods everywhere, were long a source of mingled amusement and annoyance. When we first encamped they were always at hand. A bevy of them fed in our larder at odd moments, and trotted away with tid-bits in their mouths. We were waked at night by avalanches of rooted pots and crockery. For a time this discomposed us, but we soon took it with philosophy, and dropped billets of wood on the depredators from the sleeping-apartment above, chuckling drowsily at their grunts and squeals. When the cottage was finished, they had to be content with scavenging, and we opened an offensive warfare

Summer and the Rains

with bird-shot and missiles, until the fences should be built.

It was not till the rains of summer came on that we fully realized the horrors of this delightful season. The first showers brought wafts of coolness and allayed the burning of the sands. They brought, too, a changed aspect of the monotonous earth and sky. The white scalp of a cloudy Himalaya would appear in the blue, and soon there would be a range of intolerable snows beetling toward the zenith. After the languorous dream of a sub-tropical morning, it was stirring to see the splendid energies of the air, the sweeping of the shadows, and the dramatic burst of lightning and wind. The ground trembled with the following thunder, and the world went out in a fog of driven water. As the storm drew off, the tree-toads

A Florida Farm

woke in every pine and the frogs in every pool, rasping like a malady of the ears.

But after a time the skyey pageants ceased to be events; the lightning began to javelin the pines about the cottage, and the weather fell into a lamentable aqueous intemperance. The sun rose into lowering clouds; the air became a habitat of vapors — flocks of far cirrus with sluggish rain-drift beneath, torn wracks of old storms flying low above the pines, and sulphurous thunder-heaps looming perpetually at the horizon. The soil gradually filled, and exuded water like a soaked sponge; every level became a lake, every hollow a pool. We could go nowhither without wading. When the sun came out, it was to blaze on a waste of wetness and fill the air with steam. The time was come to rest from our labors. We

Summer and the Rains

abandoned the farm for a little to the elements
and the frogs.

The Second Season

WE returned somewhat soberly for the second season's work. Reports from the farm region had been all of rains and flooding waters. Despite its drainage canal, the lake had come steadily up, like a rising tide. The beach lay beneath a fathom of water; fishes swam once more in the arable land; the canal and the drainage company were a mark for curses. But the weather "faired off" at last. New dredge-boats smoked on the horizon and drummed reassuringly across the flood, and the ebb set in.

When the higher soil had dried, beds were made for cabbage and cauliflower seeds. This

Summer and the Rains

was pretty gardening work in the mellow autumn sunshine. The beds were heaped, leveled, and overlaid with fine mould; then they were "firmed" with a trodden plank, and sprinkled to a uniform moisture. A toothed implement made shallow holes for the seeds, and these were dropped in one by one and carefully covered: for the cauliflower seeds were costly. Within a few days the beds were quick with files and phalanges of pale shoots.

There are, I dare say, keener delights than the cultivation of cabbages and cauliflowers; yet I am not sure of it, as I recall the fascination of pottering in the brown earth and taking a hand in its miracles—not with the languid sense of the sedentary man, to whom a cabbage is merely a cabbage, but with faculties quickened by fresh air and good blood, and

A Florida Farm

a pocket modestly sanguine. For the cabbage and the cauliflower, and most things that grow in a pot-garden, are but little known to him who sees them only in the pot or on the plate. To see them thus is to behold them in their death, and the man who merely assists at their obsequies and inters them stolidly in his belly has as small notion of them as the citizen digesting a meadow lark may have of the flash of the wings and the carol in the grasses. If he have a soul, and an eye which is more than an optical convenience, the gardener will walk among his vegetables with a joy beyond the smacking of lips. He will see a country-lass-like comeliness in the lusty leaves of his cabbages, and thump their green polls as he might fondle a cheek. He will gaze tenderly into the white faces of his cauliflowers, as he

The Second Season

wimples them with pinned leaves from the sun.

It was a high order of pleasure to sit upon one end of a plank, with the new hand Lyell at the other end, and fill files of seed-holes—whilst the lake trembled with light to the horizon, and the blue morning whitened to the noon. To be with Lyell was always to be in choice society. His kindly brown eyes, varying in a wide range from mirth to reflective melancholy; his olive skin and black hair; his sensitive hands, skilful with earth; and his weathered russet coat and trousers, were above painting. His converse, direct, and original with a fine sincerity, quaint with rusticity and blameless ignorance, gentle from native considerateness, now shrewd and now unfoolishly simple, was fit for patriarchs and husbandmen.

Pleasant it was to sow seeds with Lyell;

A Florida Farm

pleasant, also, in the late afternoon, to sprinkle the young plants with a rain of clattering drops. Farley and I would oftenest do this by ourselves, our heads, necks, and forearms bared to the soft wind, our legs naked above the knees for the lake-wading. It was an outward trip, with the empty water-cans swinging, the feet first in the cushiony plough-land, and then on the firm beach and in among the netting sunbeams of the margin; the eyes on the vast slumbrous level, melting to violet in the offing. It was an inward trip, with the muscles stiffened to the burden, the legs and arms cooled by the dip, and the eyes on the curtain of pines, taking redness of the low sun. Forth and back, forth and back, each turn a change in the deepening color, perhaps till the sun was gone and the silver of the moon was in the

The Second Season

long ripple and the brimming cans. To walk to and fro with the watering-cans and whistle in the twilight—this truly was a wage of the day, if it had been wearisome and parching ; for the heat and cares of it were done, and here was its quintessence, in the commerce with calm beauty and the fluting of mellow notes—mellow notes for the maker, although a sorry enough sibilation in others' ears, if they had listened ; for the whistler whistles to kindle his fancy, and wakens fairy flutes and horns, unheard by others, with the thin piping of his lips.

The ears of Rufus would now and then hearken by the kitchen stove, and his mouth would echo my staves—bettering them, I dare say—in a mocking travesty above the frying-pan. As I came in, he would eye me quizzically and

A Florida Farm

ask if I had been whistling for my supper. Upon my accepting the thought, he would clap a mound of griddle-cakes on the table, with the remark, "Well, here it is, then." And with this we would seat ourselves, Farley, Rufus, and I, whilst the dogs beat their tails on the floor.

The Cauliflower Crop

THE sun shot a milder and more oblique ray as the autumn waned, and the evenings grew chill enough for a hearth-fire of pine-knots. But the cauliflower and cabbage plants thrived with the copious dews, and in November and December we set them out in the field. The transplanting on a large scale was novel to us, but a system was soon developed, and the work took a military method. A little force of hired hands was marshaled as the sun began to decline. One hauled water and filled casks deposited about the field; another drew the marker and cross-marker; others uprooted plants from the beds. When the sun was an hour or

A Florida Farm

so from the lake-rim, the plant-droppers went ahead, like skirmishers, the main transplanting body followed with flourishing trowels, and the waterer brought up the rear. Finally, the whole force turned about and filled the watering-holes with a motion of the feet.

By the middle of December the fields bristled with thrifty growth. The soil had been made fat with muck from the marshes composted with mineral plant-foods. The cauliflowers shot up with extraordinary vigor; their leaves rustled like crisp silk, and drenched us to the waist as we walked the rows in a search for heads. Rufus observed the result with a respect tempered by sarcasm. "Cauliflowers beginning to caul?" he would ask drily, as we emerged, wet and sanguine, from their midst.

At length they began. Creamy buds appeared

The Cauliflower Crop

here and there at the hearts of the plants. We pointed them out to Rufus, and he looked at them without comment, humming the "Sweet Bye-and-bye," as his wont was when there was nothing to be said. We gathered bunches of dead broom-grass and cut the stiff stems into lengths. With handfuls of these we patrolled the long rows every morning, looking for the central curds. When one of these was found, a pair of leaves was drawn over it and pinned together with a grass-straw, to shut off the tanning sun. Another pair of leaves was pinned transversely over the first, and the heads grew, snow-white in the green shade.

Shipment of the crop began in January. The leaves and heads were loaded with dew in the morning; but at noon they had partly dried, and lost firmness by wilting. As the day de-

A Florida Farm

clined they would stiffen again to the crispness necessary for shipment. From this time on the work was sharp. Farley and I cut the stems at the ground, and laid the severed plants in heaps. These were taken in a wagon to the packing-house; and when they were gathered, the sun was commonly at the horizon and the men would be dismissed.

After supper, Farley, Rufus, and I would hang lanterns in the packing-house, and labor till the evening harvest was disposed of. The heads were neatly trimmed of leaves, mopped to remove vestiges of dew, covered with white paper, and closely packed in crates or ventilated barrels. Sometimes the work would be over by midnight. Often the morning sun would be scarlet on the pines as we marked the last barrels. The loads went off early to avoid the

The Cauliflower Crop

noon heat, and were dispatched from Osseyo City by express.

The epicure garnishing his midwinter meal with cauliflower guesses little of the sedulous labors that purvey it for his palate: the ploughing and reploughing in a Southern sun, the transplanting with the knees in the soil, the war with weeds and insects, the long waiting upon rains and heats, the contumely of Rufus, and the nodding toil beneath the stars. I once sat near such a one, in a New York restaurant, as he degusted the tender flowers and growled at their costliness. "We have to pay well for them ourselves, sir," said the waiter: "cauliflowers from Florida come high at this time of year." The epicure snorted—his voice was husky with animal well-being, and the thought of extortion ruffled his placidity. "It's shame-

A Florida Farm

ful, simply shameful!" he declared. "The growers must be a parcel of robbers!" And he glanced at me, as much as to say, "You feel with me, I'm sure." But I did not. I looked at his smug cheeks and gluttonous lips, at his soft hands and bulging waistcoat, and wished that he might earn his tidbits in the sun. "Sir," I thought, "you are deficient in imagination; you reason hastily upon abstruse matters. You should take the gift of alien dews and be thankful. The gentle cauliflower is unvengeful, but there is indigestion in it, unless it be genially absorbed. You are gazing on a purveyor, unaware. He wishes you no ill, but he is just: he mildly disagrees with you, and prays that the cauliflower may do likewise."

At this period we were uncertain of the profitability of cauliflowers, but we hoped much

The Cauliflower Crop

from them. The first returns were fabulously encouraging: -the commission merchants poured dollars and encomiums in our laps, and we went about with a dream of wealth in our eyes.

The fame of the crop and of the returns went abroad, like a murder, and the world looked in upon us, on a sudden. Buggies and sailing-boats brought excited investigators; travelling produce-agents gathered from all quarters. We were called upon, day by day, to tell the secret of our success, and blush in a circle of listeners. If we had a key to wealth, it was plain that other fingers were itching for it. We became a mark for excursions: an enterprising land-agent visited us with a steamer, a personally conducted party, flying flags, and a reporting journalist. After this our glory was blown upon the winds. The journalist wrote us up,

A Florida Farm

the land-agent cast the report liberally upon the mails, and the region and ourselves were enveloped in an atmosphere of fable. For a long time after, we encountered this report, re-copied and variously garbled—and smiled at the affluence in which we were believed to be rolling. It appeared that we had raised some hundreds of barrels of cauliflowers per acre, through the virgin richness of the soil, and realized more than the profit of an acre of wheat upon each barrel. Our costly applications of fertilizer and other minor facts were overlooked in a spirit of statistical proportion, and the account bristled with dollars.

The "Freeze"

WE presently had occasion to take our fame somewhat grimly, and to tarnish it with a reputation for mendacity by revealing the facts. The earliest shipments had been in cool weather; the cauliflowers had started crisp and sound on the northward journey, and reached colder latitudes in a condition to go safely through. But a warm spell followed, and the cauliflowers began to wilt in the southern part of the transit. The returns grew smaller, and our consignees wrote of decay and unsalable lots. There was still an average profit, however, and we hoped for better luck. But suddenly the cold returned in a long, keen-

A Florida Farm

blowing northern wind, and the bulk of the crop was harvested with a sickle of frost.

It was our first taste of freezing weather in Florida. The winter before had been cool at times. We had looked out in many a sharp dawn, expecting to see a rime on the fields; but there had not been so much as a feathered grass-spear. The frost that killed our cauliflowers was without a fellow for fifty years back, and we inevitably took it for the exception to the rule of mildness. This was the general view of it, till it was found to be the beginning of a term of cold winters, and but a balmy forerunner of the greater "freezes" which followed.

As it settled down upon us, we rallied cheerily to fight it. The sting of the pure cold invigorated us and gave us courage. The day

The "Freeze"

went down in a yellow burnished glow beyond the woods. The northern wind flowed out of the twilight in a broad stream, and the crisp grasses and pine-needles sang with it. We made haste to gather wagon-loads of Spanish moss and fat pine wood. The orange trees were swathed in moss, and moss was heaped over the maturer cauliflowers. Great fires were kindled along the northern edges of the field, and a curtain of smoke drifted all night beneath the stars. But when the morning showed along the east the soil was stiff with frost in the very lee of the flames.

The sky darkened as if for snow, on the following day, and the wind whitened the lake in a steady roaring blast that sheeted the pier with frozen spray. No snow fell upon the farm, although a native, riding near by, saw a flurry

A Florida Farm

of feathers which he suspected—for he had never seen it—to be snow. But otherwise the distinctions of a thousand southerly miles were done away, and for two days we had the biting winds and iron furrows of New England.

It is a point of the art of living to take a pleasure as though it cost nothing, if the price of it must be paid, whether or no, or if it has once been paid. In this vein we took the cold, not from a spirit of virtue, but because we must have been something else than Hyperboreans in blood and desire, not to feel the zest of bluff air and the bleak beauty of a frozen world. We had sighed sometimes for the Northern winter, and here it was, come down to us with wonted aspects of earth and sky and the rude mirth of buffetting winds. We set the hearth flaming with a hearty Northern blaze,

The "Freeze"

and drank to Winter, howling in the flue ; we filled our lungs with the winey northern wind and ran races on the beach ; we plucked icicles from the pier, and longed for the snow that hung in the gray clouds. We had paid our crops for these pleasures, but the extravagance was blameless—our purses had been used without leave asked, and we might as well have the good of it.

On the third day the thermometer rose above the freezing-point, a warm sun shone out, and the air was once more a tepid, unthrilling draught. The dead cauliflowers, which had been embalmed by the frost, drooped and fell into decay, and we began to practice philosophy. The cauliflower field was replanted with potatoes, beans, cucumbers, and other garden crops, and something was saved from the sea-

A Florida Farm

son's wreck. The returns, indeed, were considerable, and a qualified success with the frosted cabbages further heartened us.

Some Neighbors

WE had not been long in the cottage when there appeared, loosely racking toward us on a diminutive white pony, a little old man who looked as if he had ridden out of a canvas of Teniers. He wore a slouch hat of a velvet rustiness, a weathered coat, and huge calf boots which dangled from his shrunken pantaloons and rhythmically prodded the pony's belly. He drew up at the cottage, and dismounted by the simple process of tumbling down. Then he hung the bridle-rein on his elbow and came to the doorstep.

A Florida Farm

"I heered consider'ble hammerin' down yere in this old 'meta (palmetto) patch", he observed, with a twinkle: "an' I tuk a notion I'd drop in an' see what was goin' on."

I held out my hand and shook a bunch of gnarled fingers. "Very glad to see you," I said. "How do you do?"

"Wal, I'm just so's to be about," he rejoined: "my bones sorter ache. I'm an old man, but pretty toler'ble peart."

"I'm very glad to see you," I repeated: "Won't you come in?"

The old man looked about him, with a slow, non-committal survey. "I reckon I cain't stop," he said reflectively: "I'm out huntin' haugs (hogs). You hain't seen a speckled sow, with cropped ears—an underbit and an overbit—and six shoats, have you?"

Some Neighbors

We knew the sow very well. She had been one of the earliest of our woods neighbors to call upon us, and the shoats were wont to make selections from our larder ; but we had not seen them for a day or two.

The old man's countenance fell. "I reckon I'll have to feed them." he said thoughtfully : "Ef I don't give 'em a little corn now and then, they ramble powerful. Wal," he continued, brightening a bit at this determination, "it 'pears like you men mean to settle."

I said we did, and asked if he was a neighbor. "Sorter," he replied : "I live yonder by the section-line, about three-quarters of a mile over that away" (he pointed a lean arm) : "It's close quarters for folks with cows and haugs. But you ain't expecting to keep a big bunch of critters, I don't guess."

A Florida Farm

We reassured him on this point, and he glanced up at the cottage. "How do you like batchin'?" he inquired.

"Batching?" said Farley, with a puzzled countenance, "I'm not sure whether we've tried it."

The old man glanced about once more. "Why," he said, "you ain't married, are you? I don't see no signs of wimmin-folk about, no sun-bonnets or petticoats hangin' out to dry. Folks said you was just batchin' down yere by yourselves."

"Quite right," said Farley, with a smile.

The old man looked at him quizzically. "Better git you a wife," he said: "better git you a wife, to cook, an' tote water, an' wash clo's. I allus made it a pint to have a wife. It makes things a heap easier."

Some Neighbors

I observed that this was true, but that we thought we had better begin by batching.

The old man shook his head. "'Tain't the right way to farm," he averred. "Some wimmin ain't no 'count, of course, but a wife that knows her business, and understands cows an' chickens, is might' convenient."

"I reckon I'll go 'long," he said presently: "I 'llowed mebbe you'd want some haulin' done, bom-bye. I've got a wagon an' a team of auxen. Ef you let me know the day befo', so I can make my arrangemeants, I can do haulin' fer yer, most any time. There's right smart of cattle on the range, an' their fertilize is powerful good for orange-trees an' vegetables. Ef you want any cow-chips, I can send my boys to pick 'em up. My name's Rowley."

We thanked the old gentleman for his offer,

A Florida Farm

and he hoisted his boots into the stirrups and ambled away.

Old Man Rowley grew to be a familiar figure about the farm. Whenever there was odd hauling to be done, he would appear punctually with a yoke of tiny steers, and a bargain would be struck. We always welcomed him with due respect for his age and picturesqueness, and shook his gnarled fingers with a cordial, "How do you do?"—to which he invariably replied: "Wal, I'm just toler'ble," or, "I'm so 's to be about"—backwoods rejoinders of great antiquity and propriety. The negotiations being prefaced with a "Wal, I don't want to be hard on my fellow-man," and concluded with a reasonable stipulation, he would seat himself cross-legged on the wagon, a little heap of boots and bones, and drive off with aboriginal dignity.

Some Neighbors

The "chipping" brought us other visitors, from time to time. One Jawn (John) Pepper was a frequent caller upon this business. He pursued the vocation with a languor proper to the climate, but on the whole with more persistence than others, assisted by certain sun-bonneted Peppers who hovered in the distance. His father, Old Man Pepper, now and then took a hand, and various microscopical Peppers rode in upon a starveling pony attached to a two-wheeled loaded cart, their little bare legs dangling upon the shafts.

The Pepper cart was constructed of sticks and hewn slats, pinned with whittled plugs—inconceivably brittle and irresponsible. Whenever it encountered a root or a depression, it collapsed at once and lay down upon a fallen wheel, or prematurely deposited the load at the tail-

A Florida Farm

board, whilst the long shafts rose obstestingly to the sky. These misfortunes always smote the Peppers with a sense of the vast difficulty of life. Jawn said: "There!" as one who had known how it would be, Old Man Pepper stood by, wooden with impotency, and the little Peppers detached the pony and rode silently away, till their elders should have eaten and drunk, and whittled a fresh plug.

A more stirring personage to see was Joseph Maneer, a lord of herds and droves, whose confines met our own, where the far lake-side prairie was edged with woods. We rarely saw him out of the saddle, but we often met him pricking a spirited bay with a sweeping tail—a burly figure of a man, with authoritative blue eyes and a hawk-nose, sitting his mount like a baron. Or we would come upon him as the

Some Neighbors

generalissimo of an army of cattle, two aides spurring on either wing, with exploding whips and a winding jodel of cattle cries. I amused myself by fancying him in chain-mail, with a truncheon in his fist, till I met him at last afoot, and found him quite an everyday fat person. But we mostly saw him mounted, and he kept a little glamor ; for his melodious cow-boys jodelled daily in the twilight, and if the far prairie was black with cattle, or the lake-edge rustled with them, it would be remarked that "them was a bunch of Maneer's cows," or somebody would say: "Joe Maneer owns a sight of cattle!" Also, we remembered how we had once watched him spur superbly after our town-team, just returned at the gate. It had been only to restore a spilled lard-tin, but it looked like a passage-at-arms, and he had

A Florida Farm

handed over the tin, wheeling, with the bay's tail in the dust, in a manner that lingered in our minds and invested him with romance.

Another striking figure was Old Man Monson, a transplanted Georgian, with a Roman visage and a strong presence, whether afoot or in the saddle. He had been twenty years settled on a high "hammock" remote from the lake, and to us he was of a piece with his neighbors, except for a slight difference of dialect. But he still spoke with amused disdain of "dese yere Flurridy people" and "deir quare ways o' doin'." "All Flurridy's a plumb cur'osity," he was wont to say, a slow smile wrinkling his thin lips: "Dat's w'at it is, hit's a plumb cur'osity."

We used sometimes to ride over to his place, for a call, tying our horses to the tall fence



THE STATE OF NEW YORK

IN SENATE

JANUARY 1, 1901

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Some Neighbors

of zig-zag rails that fortified his land. We might find him among slim stalks of corn, one arm guiding the plough, and the fingerless stump of the other bearing on the reins, stretched about the handles. Or he would greet us at the gate with homely stateliness, and stalk before us to the veranda of his rambling log-house. It was a pictorial approach under live-oaks dripping with moss, and deep-hued orange-trees thick with golden balls.

We commonly sat in a low "po'ch," wall-less at both ends, that made an airy hall-way to the rear "po'ch." Fresh oranges would have been plucked by the way, and we would listen and respond in a gurgle of spicy pulp, as Old Man Monson discoursed of corn, and orange shipments, and forays of "haugs" in the potato-patch, and "dese ole Flurridy flat-woods."

A Florida Farm

As a person of property and character, he was on the school-board—although he had no tincture of spelling and other learning, and shared a local impression that Europe was one of the United States. We found him once incensed over a mutiny of young Crackers at the district-school. He had ridden to the scene of it, shotgun in hand, and made a speech, and he was just returned.

“W’at do you t’ink I found, over dere?” he inquired, his gray eye kindling and his handless stump sweeping with a slow gesticulation. “I found dey’d turned de teacher out o’ do’s! Dere dey wuz—a-shootin’ and a-hollerin’, des like a passil o’ heathen. Hit wuz de low-down-est t’ing I ever see!

W’at did I do? I went to de do’ an’ tole ’em dey better open it, ef dey didn’t want to

Some Neighbors

have it blowed open wi' buckshot. Dey opened it den, might' quick; an' w'en I went in, dere de wuz, a-settin' as cool as you please, like dey had n't done no devilmeant 't all!

I looked round at 'em fer a w'ile, an' den I done tole 'em w'at I thought. I said dey ought to be plumb 'shamed o' deirselves. I said I wuz n't a-gwine to stand no sich goin's on. I tole 'em me, an' Ole Man Rowley, an' Ole Man Pepper, an' Ole Man Maneer, an' all de rest o' de settlemeant done paid money to have 'em have a teacher—an' here dey wuz a-run-nin' her off, like a nigger!

I said dey wuz n't no 'count, an dey would n't be no 'count, ef dey wuz a-gwine to do like dat. I tole 'em dey got to do different. I said hit wuz de hardest kind o' work to git a teacher to come down here in de woods—an' dis totin'

A Florida Farm

revolvers to school, an' shootin' holes in de blackbo'd, an' bustin' de windeys, an spittin' terbacker on de flo' wuz 'nuff to disgust any respectable woman. I said she done right to object to it; an' ef any of 'em tuk to devilin' her again, or usin' langwitch, or doin' sich-like depredations, dey'd have to be dispelled from school! Dat's w'at I tole 'em," he concluded, with an energetic wave of the stump, "dat's w'at I done tole 'em!"

We had a neighbor of a different stripe, a half-mile away on the lake shore, an elderly person of piratical aspect and smooth address, who bore an evil fame. It was said that he was "mean," in other words, treacherously vengeful and underhanded. He was suspected of the cardinal backwoods sin of stealing a stray "haug" or so, now and then; but he was

Some Neighbors

a person of discretion, and took pains not to be found out.

Our own relations with him were mostly satisfactory, and his reputation enhanced, in some sort, his sinister agreeableness. He was a man of intelligence, sympathetically conversable, silvery and soothing of speech, and he had a fund of war and other reminiscences. His wild curling hair and chin-tuft, his genially dangerous eyes, and other piratical attributes gave a flavor to a chat with him on the beach in a lowering dusk. At the busy season, he plied an occasional hoe for us with care and fidelity. He had a stealthy humor and an open air relish for bacon. It is my impression that an occasional lost "haug" was sweet upon his lips.

The Third Season

TWO farming seasons had now, as we thought, instructed us in the business. We had formed opinions about the best seeds and crops for our latitude and soils, about methods of sowing, cultivation, and shipment. All these matters, which seem simple in the gross, were an art in the detail. The planting of potatoes, for instance, was not a thing to be well done, out of hand. The tubers must be cut with the eyes in the middle of the seed-pieces, and the moist surfaces then be sprinkled with dry soil ; the seed must be equidistantly dropped in freshly opened earth, and covered before the sun dried the furrows. The fertili-

The Third Season

zer must be nicely calculated, so much per row for a given amount per acre, and the proportion rendered in terms of bucketfuls and strewn handfuls; it must be evenly sown and stirred in, to avoid burning the sprouts. All parts of the work must be carried on in due relation, with the seed and the fertilizer barrels at convenient points, the opening-plough started soon enough, but not too soon, the covering-plough kept close after the last seed-droppings, the rows run even and lineable, that the after cultivation might be with horse-tools. Everything must be understood, foreseen, and adapted to the varying conditions of soil and weather. The working-force must be organized, inspirited, and watched; errors must be corrected without ruffling susceptibilities; men must be moved from parts of the work that advanced too quick-

A Florida Farm

ly to parts that flagged; a general spirit of carefulness, alacrity, and good-will must be maintained. What was true of this seemingly plain crop was true of the others. The farm-work was like a complex game with simple cards, always presenting new combinations and perennially shuffled by the weather.

The management of men was a nice part of the problem, one that drew steadily on the tact and the understanding. But the relation was mainly one of mutual confidence, and the draught, though exacting, was almost unconscious. Farley and I were each commonly addressed as "Cap'n," after an example set by Lyell. The term seemed to bring us nearer to the men than our patronymics would have done. It expressed our position, with a sub-flavor of kindly humor unmingled with disre-

The Third Season

spect. This last, indeed, was unknown to us in the little shifting band we "captained." Perhaps it does not readily make its appearance in simple and natural relations. The daily work which we shared kept us in touch with the men. We had occasion to realize how much endurance, fidelity, and intelligence accompanied the hoe and the plough. Perceiving this, from hour to hour, we felt a regard and an interest which prevented artificial barriers from arising. Such natural barriers as there were, in hereditary or other difference, seemed to need no emphasis. We had no theory of the matter, but the men, for the most part, appeared practically to become our friends. We never "ordered them about," not from indisposition to needful peremptoriness, but because it never seemed suitable in such willing and pleasant

A Florida Farm

association. I suppose our method would have been thought ludicrously polite by many a driving boss or foreman, but it worked well. The personal part of the management was, nevertheless, a nice task. There were varieties of aptitude to be borne in mind, and adjusted for the best results. Now and then a man would have a touch of grumbling low spirits or absent-mindedness, and a few frank words would be needed. Oftener it would be essential, without making too much of it, to imply appreciation of skilful or faithful work, and thus keep alive the most valuable elements of service.

The men regularly employed were nearly all of the "poor white" class, a class which our experience inclined us to esteem. They came from the various Southern states, and

The Third Season

brought a habit of industry less nervous and superficially energetic than the Northern, but not less telling in the long result. There was tact and a flavor of courtesy in their conversation—little of the elbowing manner and crude asserting and denying of the Yankee; their way of speech was unhurried and agreeable; they appeared to be devoid of grossness. In short, they were men with whom a gentleman might be at ease, as with a homely variety of his own species.

We entered the third season with some confidence. Various crops had been tried on small areas. Cabbages and potatoes had specially thriven and proved to be shipable, and the greater part of the plough-land was devoted to them. The fields had been extended far along the lake side, to include a tract of marsh

A Florida Farm

dried by a further lowering of the water. The soil was here a residuum of decayed bog-plants, deep and mellow, which bore heavy rains without saturation, and sucked up the sub-moisture steadily in dry weather. It was of a glowing umber color that warmed the sunlight, and when it was darkened by rain the foliations and glistening greens of the crops lay on it like designs on velvet. Transplants in this part of the farm started without the watering that was needful in the sandier earths. The setting out of cabbage-plants proceeded, accordingly, with dispatch.

We had improved the details of the process, and took satisfaction in its speed. The fields, as ploughed, lay in "lands" parted by water-furrows—broad brown ribbons, some hundreds of yards long, slightly rounded, like the ribs of

The Third Season

a corduroy. Along these the row-marker was drawn by a practiced hand, its teeth making a pattern of equidistant parallels, accurately straight from end to end. A marker was then drawn cross-wise of the "lands," and plants were dropped at the intersections of the lines. Each transplanter moved in the space between two pairs of lines, and set four plants, two on either hand, before moving forward to the next cross-mark. The pace was given by the man naturally briskest, and the others had a pride in keeping it. Each plant was caught up between the left thumb and forefinger, a thrust of the trowel opened a hole, the roots were laid in this, and the loose earth was packed to them with a pressure of the right fist and the trowel-handle. Whilst you might moderately count ten, every man would have

A Florida Farm

set four plants and moved to another four.

This was the practical aspect. There was also the picturesque side. An onlooker might see Rufus, like Millet's "Sower," stalking solemnly ahead with an armful of green stuff, his right hand rhythmically drawn in and thrust out, as he dropped the plants. Behind him came five or six motley personages in weathered garments of a ripe antiquity, crawling on their knees, and as it were viciously stabbing and fisting the soft earth. Rufus, crooning a Moody and Sankey hymn, might be likened to a ghostly superior imposing penance; and his followers to penitents engaged in some uncouth rite of self-mortification—for the prick of emulation gave a silent Trappist fervor to the toil, and the hands and legs of the toilers were humbly embrued with muck. Meanwhile, the

The Third Season

low sun struck red across the field, and a little company of shadows gesticulated beside the workers. When the sun was gone the group dispersed; and Farley, Rufus, and I wended homeward along the beach—the embers of a cloud, or, if it were late, an early star trembling in the broad water. On the following day and for two or three days after, the plants drooped, if it were sunny; but they soon took root and broadened.

Shipments and Navigation

AS the season advanced, the bulk of the increased harvest made us take to the water for our freighting. A lighter was built and moored off the beach; and this or a hired lighter was heaped in the early morning with packed crates and barrels, and taken in tow for Osseyo City by a steamer. In the spring the energies of the farm force were centered on this task. A mountain of cage-like crates, nailed together at the packing-house, was accumulated between shipments. The cabbage-heads, gathered in sacks, were stripped of loose leaves and wedged in the crates, which were then closed, labeled, and carted to the

Shipments and Navigation

lighter. The potatoes were sorted by sizes and barreled. If the weather allowed, this was done on the beach, with the lake shimmering at hand, and perhaps the smoke of the approaching steamer quickening the work. Three hoarse blasts of her whistle would be the signal for every nerve to be strained; the last loads would be hurried aboard, the mules and oxen splashing the bright water; and then all would be still again, save for the farewell blast and the throb of the departing engines.

The gathering of potatoes was a sociable toil. The men plied their digging-hoes by twos and threes in adjoining rows, with an accompaniment of gossip and ringing laughter. It had, too, a zest of subterraneous exploration, like mining. One stroke of the hoe would unearth a disappointment, perhaps only a single big

A Florida Farm

tuber among a cluster of "seconds;" but the next would make up for it, and lay bare a hatful of fat potatoes. The tubers came clean and abundant out of the brown marsh soil, and made a great volume of valuable shipments.

With favoring winds, we freighted a huge catamaran that spread sails like a sea-going vessel. But these voyages, though mostly lucky in the carriage of cargo, were subject to the caprice of the winds. The catamaran, built for shallow navigation, displaced little water and much air. Her high-floating twin hulls caught a head wind more copiously than the sails. Before the wind, or with a beam wind, she made a fine showing, and swept the cabbages swellingly into port. But if the breeze shifted ahead, no one could tell what would come of it. Departures in her were, accordingly, under-

Shipments and Navigation

taken only with a propitious wind. I, her inventor, was generally her navigator and crew, putting forth on the little inland main with a rich sense of adventure. The run to Osseyo City was made in an hour or two, uniformly without mishaps. The freight being transferred to the railway station, and some house supplies taken on, I made haste to re-embark, for the real adventure now commonly began.

The return wind, I believe, was never known to be fair. Sometimes there was none at all, or a catspaw that shifted ahead with every tack; sometimes there was a gale from the precisely wrong quarter. The lake, always beautiful, was often surpassingly so at these times. Now and then it was ridged in dark ultramarine furrows, lipped with foam, which the twin prows cut like lances. Again, it would be dreaming

A Florida Farm

in lilac calms feathered with blue breezes, and the catamaran would drift lazily hither and thither—down the blazing highway that led to the sinking sun ; then, with a shift of the helm, out upon a plain of flaw-marbled glass ; now toward a ruddy bluff of cloud ; and again, toward the purple fringe of the westerly woods. One thing was certain : whether it ploughed a crisp-ing swell or drifted with desultory breezes, the catamaran would make leeway as if that were its proper business, and consume the day and perhaps part of the night, whilst Farley and Rufus were speculating on its whereabouts, and gibing at its inventor. Two or three times it had a waft of good wind after many adverse hours, and bore down upon its moorings while it might still be seen. But such winds blow rarely for misbegotten things. Usually the day

A Florida Farm

...sails feathered with blue breezes, and the boat would drift lazily hither and thither down the blazing highway that led to the open sea; then, with a shift of the helm, it would pass a pair of flaw-marbled glass; now toward a hoary bluff of cloud, and again, toward the fringe of the westerly woods. One thing was certain: whether it ploughed a crisp-crested sea or drifted with desultory breezes, the craft must make leeway as if that were its proper business, and consume the day and perhaps part of the night, whilst Farley and Rufus were speculating on its whereabouts, and gibing at its inventor. Two or three times it had a waft of good wind after many adverse hours, and bore down upon its moorings while it might still be seen. But such winds blow rarely for misbegotten things. Usually the day





Shipments and Navigation

was gone, and the solitary mariner had long been steering by the stars, when the cottage beacon shone round "The Point," with hints of supper and a bed in its ray. If there were a moon, the night hours, however weary and lenten, took a spectral glamor worth the fast. But under inky heavens and oncoming storm, it was more moving. With aching limbs and a hunger that fainted from neglect, I have beaten to and fro in sheer blackness, sailing on one tack till the further shore showed suddenly under the bows, and then on the other till the hither shore was suspected—with thunder rolling up from the south, and only a random vicious flash to show the course; and I have cast anchor far-off, and disembarked in the small morning hours, to find my way home by the feeling of the feet on the

A Florida Farm

beach, in torrents of rain—with a delicious sense of lonely misery and misfortune.

Let no one who has not tried it fancy that the luxuries of frontier life lie in cabinet organs and cases of claret, in tinned plum-puddings and the indigestions of civilization. The real luxuries of the life are the hardships of it—the long endurances of wind and sun, the grotesque paucity of inessentials, the grim humors of circumstance, the aching muscles, and the blissful stupefactions of fatigue.

We now went often to town, for the mail or groceries, in the little Egret ; and a sail in her was a delicate water-pleasure, for she was apt in all sailing points, and a light pull for the oars. She would slip swiftly over the shining miles, the ripples tinkling at her bow, and bring us home again with no more delay

Shipments and Navigation

than a little waiting on the wind, if it were calm and we disinclined for the oars. These trips to civilization polished us and sensibly thinned the rust of the woods. We affected a stoicism, as persons not unused to the world ; but, emerging fresh from the wilderness, we were secretly a little dazed as we came among men. The small city gleamed pleasantly amid its pines, and cast a picture on the wave. Here were the triple verandas and red roofs of the hotel; yonder the blue and white business "blocks;" the square belfry and green blinds of the Methodist church rose among its live-oaks, and the Baptist church uplifted a horn ; here were cottages, and even houses ; there the new bank, painted in three colors, and some buildings of brick. Pleasure-boats put forth with a freight of muslined femininity ; people

A Florida Farm

went to and fro, in a holiday mood, on the verandas; a train drew up at the station, and a locomotive bound for far cities panted on the rails.

We entered these stirring scenes with a certain thrill and a wary self-command, as of rustics minded not to stare too curiously. There were lists of supplies to be filled; perhaps a hardware and a dry-goods store to be nonchalantly visited, as if it were quite an every-day thing to be at leisure and make purchases. And when these things were done, there were newly distributed mails, with precious letters. Lastly came the strange experience of a hotel dinner, served luxuriously in little oval dishes that some one else washed. When this was eaten, we commonly lingered on the hotel piazzas with fellow farmers, gath-

Shipments and Navigation

ered from about the lake, and voluble upon drought, freight charges, and mutilated returns. Or there might be a sojourning beauty or two, curious about frontier ways, and, Desdemona-like, willing to listen sympathetically to a tale of tanned Othellos.

The sinking sun roused us from these dalliances: the Egret's sail was hoisted to the breeze, and her stem once more pointed for the wilds. There was a strange delightfulness in these twilight cruises, a sense of satisfied home-returning oddly at variance with departure from comfortable meals and the neighborhood of men. The city sank away in a mellow dusk, its lights sparkling out here and there; the bearded cypress on the halfway point grew on the darkening waste; the little Egret bounded sanguinely over the waves; and by and

A Florida Farm

by, lo ! yonder—the far pale curve of the farm
beach, and Rufus' lantern twinkling like a star !

Some Results

THE farmer is everywhere a much enduring animal. The burden of the social fabric lies on his patient back. Society sits astride, sleek and well-fed, and picks tid-bits from his panniers. For his part, he munches thistles. Now and then he ruminates upon the matter, and his heels appear suddenly in the air. Whereupon Society pats his rough coat and flatters his long ears, and he jogs sullenly on. This is perhaps a providential arrangement for the farmer, as well as for Society. It gives him an opportunity to practice virtue, and a license to grumble. We grumbled over the returns from our cabbages and potatoes ; but these mounted altogether to a large figure, and they were

A Florida Farm

swelled by additions from the smaller crops : the cucumbers and onions that mostly dried away in a long drought, the egg-plants that mostly ripened too late, the beans and tomatoes that bore indifferently in the low soil, the little field of cauliflowers nipped anew by the frost. The money receipts were triple those of the year before, and seemed to promise well for the future.

In this comparatively rosy aspect of the farm there was a natural blossoming of hopefulness and matrimony. Rufus succumbed, and Seth, and Lyell's son, Needham—and the little Love-god hovered above the harvest. — Seth's wooing had gone forward stealthily at many a "frolic" in the woods cabins : for Seth was of a cautious turn, and perhaps conscious of lacking some of the elements of success. He had

Some Results

a clear blue eye, indeed, and sterling virtues. No one on the farm was steadier, no one more gallant in the ticklish work of branding cattle. But gray streaks were in his hair and he was thin — a mere linear energy in clothes, although hale and able. Moreover, he was smitten with the belle of the woods, lustrous-eyed and soft-voiced, but of uncertain mood. Seth's prudence now and then sided with the maiden's caprice; hers was a dubious family to marry into, a wild strain, quick with knives and pistols, and desperately poor; Madeline's household virtues were unknown. But she was convincingly fair. Seth resolved at last that he would marry her, if he might, though he should rue it for the rest of his days. This we learned from his simple lips, when he came one evening to tell us that he expected to "git

A Florida Farm

him a cook." We suppressed a smile at the form of the tidings, and assented to a loan of the horse and buggy, and Seth drove off for a few days. When he returned, it was with a justifying piece of beauty. The two dwelt in a small building within sight of the cottage. The young wife seemed pensive at first, her large eyes swimming in a deer-like bewilderment; but she settled quietly into matrimony and the cooking of meals, and made a pleasing figure: whether she trode lightly, with dangling water-buckets, to the lake; or "battled clo's," with tucked skirts and shapely bared arms; or came out, with sun-gleams on her print frock, to hew wood with an axe. Seth took his bliss, and whatever disillusions it brought, with a native taciturnity. But he unbosomed himself a little to Lyell. It appeared that the beauty

Some Results

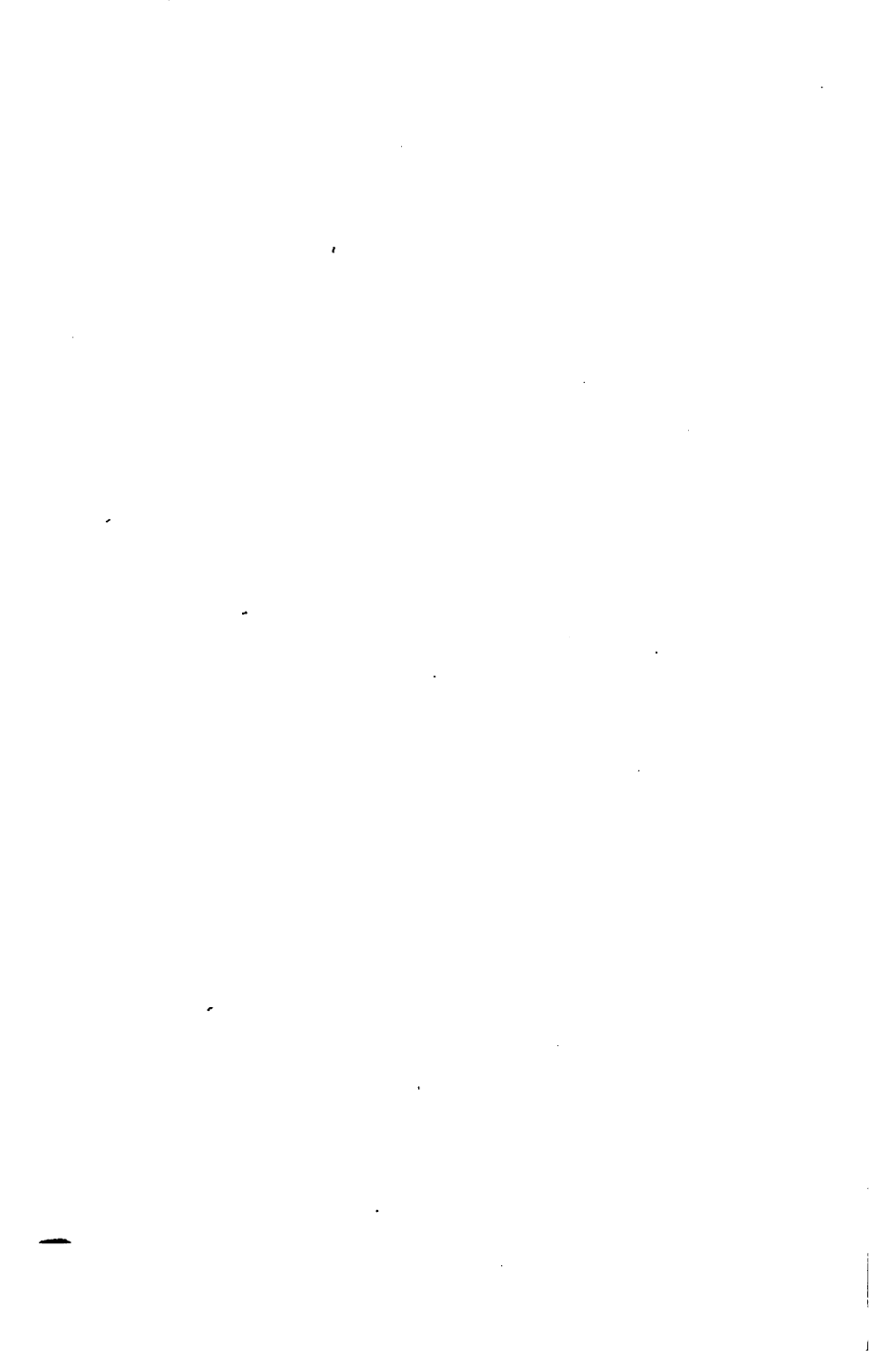
by and by grew indolent, and "lay a-bed" in the morning. Finding admonishment fruitless, Seth cooked the breakfasts for a time. At length, with honest woods discipline, he "took the stick to her," and she once more rose betimes.

Needham had been used to ramble on about marriage, with a refrain of cackling laughter. According to him, there was a "heap of foolishness" in it. Some fellers made out they was in love, and just let a girl do what she liked with 'em. He, it seemed, knew better. He meant to look about and pick him out a girl with cows and right smart of land. But presently he came to marriageable years, a healthy youth, with curling black hair and a kind of simple peasant beauty ; and a neat, almost cultivated little person, landless, cowless, and as unsuitable as possible, loved him

A Florida Farm

and was loved. Lyell objected to the affair, and interposed a veto. But matters were not mended thereby: the forest ways were open, and Needham was not to be kept at home. In his bafflement, Lyell hit on a scheme that seemed to him the flower of parental subtlety. The girl had been seen by Needham only in Sunday gowns, or attired for the twilight wooing. He should see her in the daily calico and sun-bonnet, above the frying-pan and the tub. She was accordingly invited for a visit—which, in this laborious plain life, meant a sharing of the house-work—and other youths were encouraged to dangle about her, to “git up a jealousy.” The “jeelousy” was Lyell’s master-card; he counted on it with ludicrous confidence. Needham, he thought, would be “plumb disgusted” by it. But it proved to be other-





Some Results

wise. The sun-bonnet added a charm, the frying-pan took a glamor; and the "jeelousy" was the very shaft of Cupid. Lyell threw up his hand, and the game at hearts was won.

We were perhaps more interested in the wooing of Rufus than in any other romance of the farm. On the face of it, there was an inherent improbability that made it piquant. Rufus was naturally a misogynist, and he nursed a causticity toward everything Floridian. The sun-bonneted female was a standing butt for his humor. He had once come upon a couple of woods nymphs seated in a cabin "po'ch," with pipes in their mouths; and it was better than a play to see him mimic them. But one day, as he was killing a possum that had crept under the kitchen, two ponies drew up at the door. On one of them was a little brown-

A Florida Farm

legged boy; on the other a sun-bonneted girl, seated sidewise on a man's saddle.

"Killin' a possum, are yer?" queried the little boy, unnaturally grave.

Rufus took a quizzical sense of the visitors. "I call it a polecat," he observed, winking toward the cottage.

The little boy looked contemplatively at the possum. "What makes yer call it a polecat?" he asked.

Rufus winked again. "Because I killed it with a pole."

The little boy meditated upon this; but the sun-bonnet emitted a peal of laughter like blown flute-notes, and fell back from a silvery blonde head.

Rufus looked at the wearer. He liked to quiz; he liked still better to have his quizzing relished.

Some Results

The girl looked at Rufus, with a flush beneath her clear tan. "You're Rufus, ain't you?" she asked shyly.

Rufus nodded. "Who are you?" he awkwardly inquired.

The girl smiled. "I 'llowed you was Rufus," she observed: "Folks said you was comical. My name's Maneer—Mandy," she added, as if to explain. There was something touching in the word: it fell softly and, as it were, appealingly from her lips. Everyone, it was clear, was expected to have heard of Mandy.

But she seemed suddenly to bethink herself; her two hands rose to adjust the sun-bonnet, and her comely brown arms showed to the elbows. "I come to buy a mess o' greens," she said sedately: "Maw's puny, and she cain't eat bacon and sich; and so Paw told me to go

A Florida Farm

over to Mr. Rowley's for some cabbage. But Mr. Rowley's haugs has broke out and destroyed his cabbage-patch. Mr. Rowley he studied about it, and he reckoned mebbe you'd let me have a mess—bein' as you had such a heap. He told me I could bring Wesley, here, with me," she concluded, looking at her small escort.

This speech, delivered in a mellow adagio which was, but should not be called, a drawl, was of the sort to sharpen Rufus' satire—but I noted, glancing through the blinds, that his countenance was softened, perhaps a little lackadaisical. He seemed to be conscious that he was not playing his usual part—for he jerked the pole abruptly under the kitchen, and hummed a bar of "The Sweet By and By." "All right, a-l-l right!" he said, as he took the pony's bit, to lead it to the cabbage field.

Some Results

"Come along, Ginger! You can stay here, sonny, and see whether the pole-cat's playing possum."

But this arrangement did not suit Mandy. "I reckon he better come too," she said demurely, and the little Cracker followed.

Rufus was not quite the same, after this. His mimetic vein ceased to flow, he whistled oftener and more sentimentally — and when we remarked on it, he asked curtly what we would have a fellow do with his mouth. He borrowed the horse and buggy now and then. It was observable that he generally borrowed a cabbage or a cauliflower at the same time. The sequel showed that these clandestine shipments were successful — but there was that about Rufus which forbade inquiry, at the time.

The Fourth Season

THUS far the outlook had been pleasantly auroral, but it now began to change. Little by little, in our three laborious seasons, we had learned to encounter the difficulties of our undertaking, and we fancied that we knew them all. The farm had raised increasing harvests of vegetables, and it now began to raise a little thrifty livestock: cattle ranging the grass-land, swine fattening on the crop waste, and tow-haired children of the hands, indirectly sprung from the returns. These things had been fought for and wrung from a raw soil and a climate which was an ambush of surprises. The farm had also begun to yield a crop of

The Fourth Season

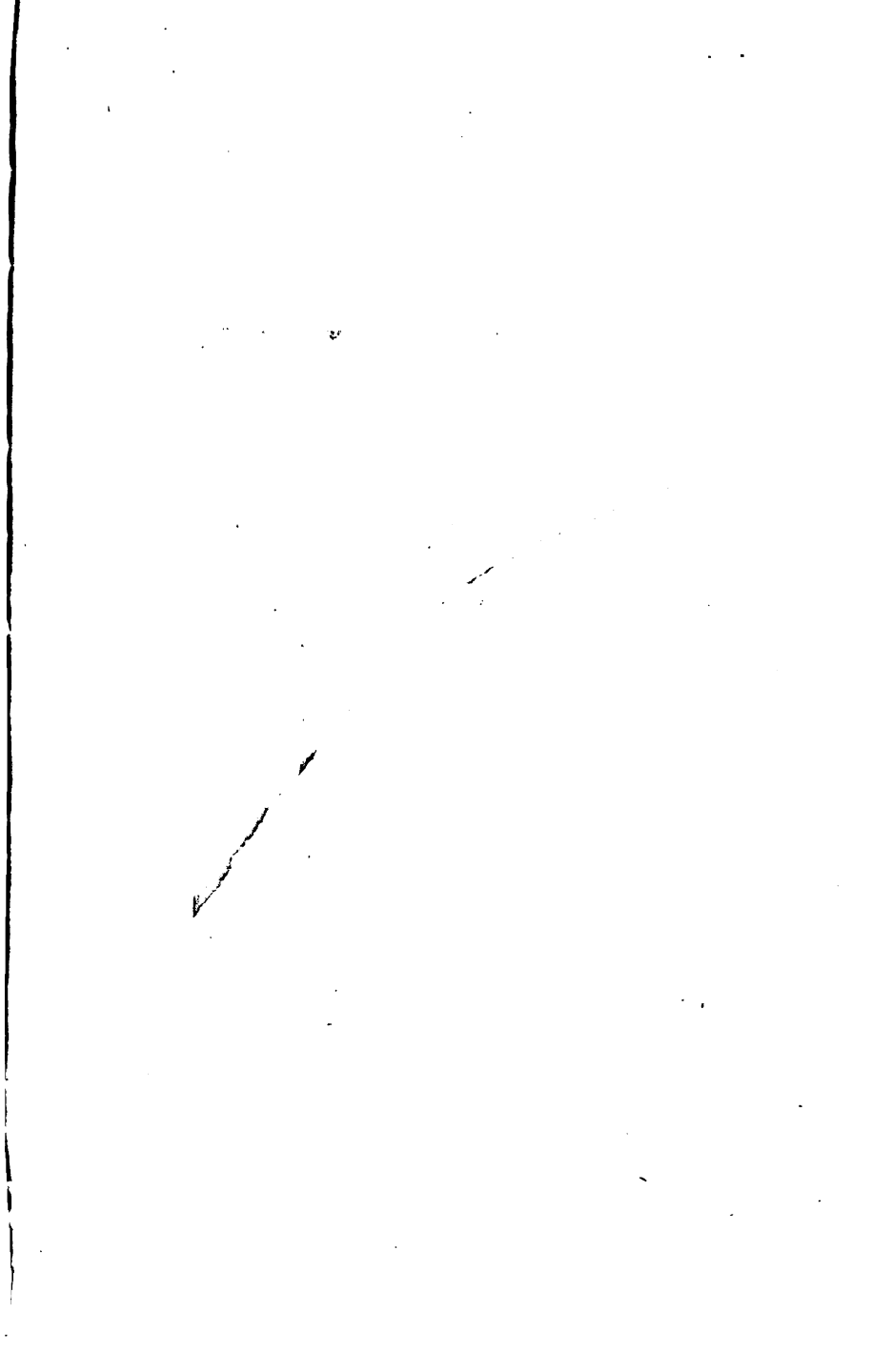
expectations, and it seemed as if these were to be harvested. To recur to the metaphor I have used, the aspects were those of a slow sunrise, bound to be accompanied with a little gold at last. But it was really a sunset time, and the prospect was brightening only to darken the more blankly.

When we gathered for the fourth season, we found the lake overbrimmed and rippling far inland. The unsubmerged fallows were too soft for the foot; even the sandier earths were sodden with long rains. The wet season had been phenomenal, and it was still at its height a month after it commonly closed. There was nothing for it but to sow seeds for transplants, and trust that there might by and by be dry land to receive them.

The rain paused, the lake fell, the fields here

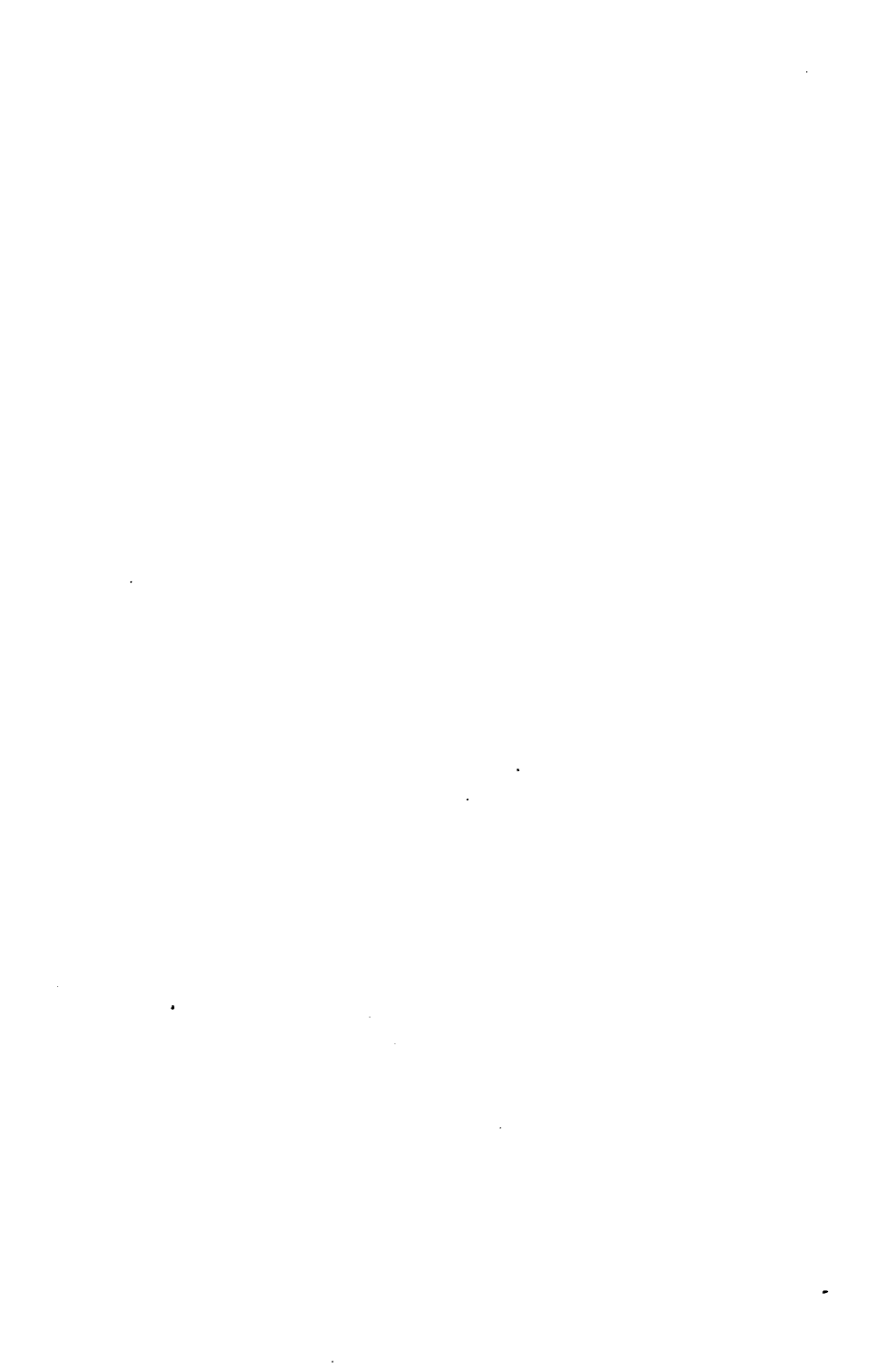
A Florida Farm

and there upbore the plough, and we hastened to make up for lost weeks. The rain paused till we had planted large tracts. Then it fell upon our work, and undid it. It held off again, and again we planted; and once more it fell upon us, like a lurking cat upon mice. Writing after the event, I should seem to tell only of fatuities if I were to say how often we replanted, and how often we were redeluged. We seized upon each fair day, we contested every inch, as it were, of the season and the farm, till the lake had risen from the lowland to the upland, and the last tilled acre was expunged. The normal rainy season is of about four months' length; the heavy rains of this year lasted for eight months. When it was too late to plant for market, the skies cleared and the lake withdrew with our costly flotsams.



inch, and
till the river
upland, and
The normal
months' length
lasted for eight
to plant for
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The Fourth Season

Certain weeks of this flood-time were curiously pleasant. After the agony of the struggle there came a truce. The season was lost, the farm-hands were dispersed, and our hopes and cares were ended for a time. We lay on our arms and looked indifferently on the victorious waters. Farley sat all day before an easel in the still lakeside chamber, I thumbed old classics by a crackling hearth, and the rains tinkled on the roof. By turns, we went down to light the kitchen fire and tend the kettle and the skillets. We grumbled at these tasks, yet we rather enjoyed the making of meals. When the table was cleared, we washed the dishes sociably in a little red kitchen like a ship's galley. Afterward, Farley mounted the latticed stair, and I paced the veranda, above the flood, as Noah may have paced the Ark's quarter-deck.

A Florida Farm

The scene had a primeval quality that fits the parallel. The cottage lawn, indeed, was mown and set with orange-trees, but all beyond was the immemorial wilderness of the Seminoles. Their arrow-heads lay thick in the beach sand, some sharp as if just chipped for the shaft, others broken as they may have rebounded from Spanish corselets. The barky pillars of the pines loomed sparsely from the near palmettos, and thickened to a blue curtain in the distance. Gray mosses hung from their somber needles, and dripped with the showers or flaunted in the wind-gusts. Thickets of fantastic palms broke the gray stretch of the lake. Except for the farm-buildings to the north, and the lawn, there was no hint of man in the wide prospect — only an aboriginal solitude of woods and water.

The Fourth Season

But now and then a rifle-shot cracked across the lake ; or a cowboy from the saloons whooped in the forest, and discharged the chambers of his revolver, with a brisk, humanizing effect. If the wind were right, it brought us, too, in the mid-morning and the dusk, a far-away thunder of trains and clarion blasts from the northern express. And often the clouds would lift for a few hours, the leaden water would turn to silver, and the brooding pines and palmettos kindled with colors.

Finis

THE fifth season opened with dry soil in all parts of the farm. We had received a blow between the eyes, and we were still somewhat staggered; but that, clearly, was a reason for new efforts. The crops were planted; they came up well; the lake drew far out upon its sands. We ceased to tremble at a cloud, and presently began to wish for one with water in it. Sometimes the sky thickened, and a few drops speckled the dust; but soon the sun was out again, and the soil lay unslaked. The weeks went by, and no rain fell but an occasional niggard sprinkle; the months passed without any wetting of the parched fields. The crops on the high land

Finis

took autumnal tints, and withered ; the crops on the lower land dried away ; the crops on the lowest land still grew. It seemed that we might yet make half a harvest. But far on in March, when the thermometer had long been in the eighties, the wind whipped suddenly into the north, and the air cooled fifty degrees in a night.

We were in the field, perspiring in linens, when the change came, with an abrupt over-casting of the sky. A whiff like the breath from a glacier struck us, the wind blew each moment keener, and before we fairly saw how it was our teeth were chattering. It was well-nigh unbelievable ; but presently there could be no doubt that a January norther was upon us, two months out of season. When we realized this, we set all hands at work to earth over